

choice

OCTOBER 2007 • CHOICE.COM.AU



**It's sold!**

Selling your property?  
How to find a real estate  
agent who won't rip you off.



**Cheddar is back**

CHOICE's expert tasters find  
great cheddar, even in your  
local supermarket.

**On test**

- + Dual-fuel ranges
- + 66 cm TVs
- + Digital cameras
- + Portable air conditioners
- + Vacuum cleaners
- + Treadmills

# Protecting your skin

## Which moisturisers are value for money?

MOISTURISER+  
SPF

Why designer shoes cost so much

Energy-efficient lights — what you need to know

Landlines: can you really save \$30 a month?

127 PRODUCTS  
RATED!

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**How CHOICE helps you.** CHOICE gives you the power to choose the very best goods and services, and avoid the worst. Because we pay full price for the products we test, we can remain 100% independent. We don't take advertising and we don't accept freebies from industry — our only aim is to give consumers the best possible information about buying products and services. Our income is only from subscriptions to our magazines and [choice.com.au](http://choice.com.au), and from other services we supply for the benefit of consumers. We're not a government body and we don't receive government funding.

We have laboratories in Marrickville, Sydney, that test everything from juicers to plasma TVs, coffee grinders to MP3 players and air conditioners. We test hundreds of products every year. There's no hidden agenda to our testing — we simply road-test products so that consumers like you don't get ripped off. CHOICE ratings are based on lab tests, expert assessments and consumer surveys.

CHOICE also has staff who research a wide range of consumer services — everything from the financial industry to the organic food business, supermarket practices to drug companies and pharmacies. They reveal the truth behind the facts and figures, and investigate quality and claims.

CHOICE has also always campaigned about consumer goods and services that affect your life. We lobby government and regulators on behalf of all consumers in Australia. CHOICE was established in 1959 and is a not-for-profit, non-party-political organisation.

## CHOICE Best Buy

**BEST  
BUY**

CHOICE nominates a product as a Best Buy if it delivers high quality at a comparatively low price. Not every test report has a Best Buy.

## CHOICE Shopper

**CHOICE  
SHOPPER**

**BEST VALUE**

Call 1300 360 655. All you need is the model name and number you want to buy, the price you want to beat, and your CHOICE subscriber number. CHOICE Shopper is available to personal subscribers only.

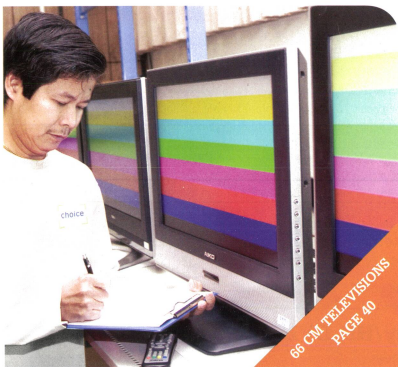
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## On test

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- 52 +** Home treadmills: experts assess how much you need to spend to get a treadmill to suit you.



## CHOICEextra.com.au

This is a free website for CHOICE magazine subscribers. It's an index of articles going back to Jan/Feb 2002, with links to PDFs so that you can read many of them immediately. You log in with your subscriber number, which is above your name on the mailing label that comes with the magazine.

## Comment

### Unfair bank penalty fees



**W**e now pay \$1.6 billion a year in bank fees on deposit accounts — an increase of 45% between 2002 and 2006. Average credit card penalty fees increased even more over the same period. Seven years ago there were few, if any, fees for exceeding your credit limit; now the average is \$30, with the highest at \$35. Other penalty fees are as high as \$50.

The website [www.fairfees.com.au](http://www.fairfees.com.au), which CHOICE set up with the Consumer Action Law Centre, lets you download a standard complaint letter, send an email to the Treasurer and share your story about unfair fees. In the first six weeks of the campaign, more than 1000 people sent an email to the Treasurer and hundreds shared their experiences online.

From the hundreds of stories emailed to us, it's clear that consumers object to penalty fees on a range of grounds. We've seen cases where the bank could easily have helped the customer avoid the fee but chose not to. In other cases, penalty fees are applied to trivial amounts, and are very high compared with the actual costs incurred by the bank.

Many people have had penalty fees reversed. One person told us that a two-cent charge to her account caused a cheque to be dishonoured and cost her \$70 in fees — and still with a \$30 bill to pay. Another customer was charged a \$30 fee for being overdrawn when her monthly \$5 account-keeping fee put her account 87 cents in the red.

CHOICE thinks these fees are unfair and warrant an investigation by an independent regulator. You can share your story of being charged unfair fees at [www.fairfees.com.au](http://www.fairfees.com.au).

At the time of going to press, more than 25,000 letters have been downloaded and several banks have abolished unfair fees or announced fairer policies. CHOICE is calling on all banks to abandon inappropriate fees, improve transparency in setting fees and to communicate better with customers about their accounts. We think penalties are levied unfairly and potentially illegally, at rates well above their true cost to financial institutions. ■

**Anny Friis**  
Editorial Director



GENE BOSS

## + TRAVEL OPTIONS

## Hop on the bike bus

If you'd like to reduce your carbon footprint, get fit and save money, joining a 'bike bus' could be the perfect starting point. A bike bus is a group of people who meet up and ride to work every day for social and safety reasons. According to [bikebus.org.au](http://bikebus.org.au), you can cut 1.3 tonnes of greenhouse emissions every year by cycling instead of driving a daily journey of 10 km each way.

The 'bus routes' are divided into three speeds: express (25 km/h), intermediate (20 km/h) and social (15 km/h) to suit cyclists at different skill levels. Most bike buses operate in NSW, but riders in other parts of Australia are encouraged to start their own local bus groups with friends and colleagues. To find out how to join a bike bus near you or for tips on how to start one, go to [www.bikebus.org.au](http://www.bikebus.org.au). If you're not ready for a bike bus but fancy a taste of what it's like to cycle, why not sign up for the National Ride to Work Day on 17 October? You can register at <http://ride2work.bv.com.au>. ■

## + HOME ENTERTAINMENT

## Will you buy into the Blu-ray/HD DVD buzz?

There's a lot of hype in home entertainment stores about these two competing DVD formats. Both have some big brands behind them and both want your dollars.



They're being marketed as the answer to your DVD-watching prayers, but don't believe the sales pitch.

**T**V screen resolutions have increased over the past few years with the introduction of LCD and plasma screens, offering the potential for more detailed pictures. Meanwhile, the introduction of high-definition (HD) TV broadcasting has kindled interest in ways to record and play back high-definition images.

**Q What are Blu-Ray and HD DVDs?**

**A** Put simply, they're DVD formats designed to allow lots more information to be put on a DVD-sized disc. The discs can be used to deliver better sound and vision than a normal DVD, as well as extras such as interactive menu systems. If you have a computer with a Blu-ray or HD DVD writing drive, you can use the extra storage for backing up large hard drives or storing lots of video footage.

**Q Do you need a special player to watch these formats?**

**A** Yes, but see right for six reasons why we don't think you should bother with one.

**Q Will Blu-ray and HD DVD players play normal DVDs?**

**A** Yes. Each manufacturer of Blu-ray players has to decide to put in the necessary equipment, but they all do at present. HD DVD uses the same DVD disc structure and players are backwards-compatible.

**Six reasons not to buy one**

- At this stage, either system could become the dominant format, or they may end up coexisting.

Nobody knows: it's VHS vs Beta all over again, if you remember the video wars.

- New technology is expensive. It'll come down in price once manufacturers begin producing it in some volume. Patience will save you money.
- If you have a screen with a resolution of less than 1280 x 720 pixels, you're not going to see any improvement in picture quality. Blu-ray and HD DVD formats are designed to deliver lots of data, but there's no point if your screen can't display it.
- Both formats can deliver high-quality sound, but only if you have the equipment to decode and deliver it. Most home theatre systems we've tested have been pretty ordinary performers and wouldn't sound any better if they were hooked up to one of these players.
- The discs cost more, so you'll pay more to watch the same movie (the movie *Babel*, for example, is around \$10 cheaper in normal DVD format).
- There's a limited number of titles on these formats at present. Some movies exist on both formats, but many are exclusive to one. This situation will improve as the formats become better established, but again, it's a case of which one and when?

For more info on Blu-ray and HD DVD technology and the movie titles available, go to:

- Blu-ray — [www.blu-ray.com](http://www.blu-ray.com).
- HD DVD — [www.thelookandsoundofperfect.com](http://www.thelookandsoundofperfect.com). ■

## + FOOD INFORMATION

## Food less travelled

Climate change, global warming, carbon footprints — we all know the latest 'eco' buzzwords. Now there's another to add to the list: food miles. These are a measure of how far food travels from source to plate, and are a way of quantifying the impact on the environment of what you eat.

**Make sure food you buy locally is of good quality — supporting a supplier of low-quality food is in no-one's interests.**

**F**rom a 'green' perspective, the less distance your food travels, the better it is for the environment.

Transporting food contributes to carbon dioxide emissions — and it's not just the distance travelled that counts, but the mode of transport used. Transporting something by plane creates more carbon emissions than transporting the same thing by ship, for example.

Food miles may also take into account how far you travel to buy the food, and the transportation of the food product's packaging. And travel contributes to air pollution as well as carbon dioxide emissions.

According to the Australian Conservation Foundation, little research has been done on the environmental impact of food miles in Australia. A recent study carried out in Victoria found that for a typical Victorian food basket, 21,073 km were clocked up. More work has been undertaken overseas — in particular in the UK, where much of the food, especially fresh produce, is imported. For example, onions are imported into the UK from New Zealand, travelling 19,310 km in the process. In the UK, food miles contribute nearly 2% of the country's total annual carbon emissions.

Our sister magazine in the UK, *Which?*, demonstrated some of the complexities and ethical dilemmas that food miles present. For instance, it found that while buying locally may reduce transport emissions, avoiding imported food products can damage the economies of developing countries.

A recent report for the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs in the UK found that measuring food miles is complicated by many factors, and carbon dioxide emissions are often measured incorrectly. There are lots of trade-offs: for example, is it better to use energy-intensive farming methods in an environment with worse growing conditions, resulting in fewer food miles once grown, or to clock up food miles transporting produce from a country where more favourable growing conditions mean less intensive farming methods?

And how practical is it to limit your food purchases to items that have been grown or made within a short radius of your home — that is, being a 'locavore'? It's rare to find farms close to major urban centres, but most big cities, regional centres and towns have regular farmers' markets, at which you should be able to find a good range of mostly locally grown produce. It can also help to shop locally — walk to the shops.

But make sure the produce is also of good quality — supporting a supplier of low-quality food is in no-one's interests, local or not. If you're not happy, tell them you'd love to shop locally with them but won't do so until their food's quality improves.

Food miles is a complex issue, and we'll keep you posted when more research is done in Australia on their impact on the environment. ■

## In brief

## Labelling mischief

This pack of John West tuna is called 'light tuna', which you might think means it's lower in fat or kJ than other tinned tuna. But all tuna in springwater or brine is low in fat and kJ. In fact 'light' here means light-meat tuna — lighter in colour and less fishy than dark meat. Don't be tricked into choosing a brand because of clever labelling.



BENIE ROSS

## Financial planning fees

In a recent research study of 1350 financial planners by Brandmanagement, over 40% said clients were asking more questions about fees. CHOICE advises you to do this, to find out what you'll pay and give you the chance to negotiate. Cost components of financial advice that you might negotiate include:

- A fee for preparing a plan.
- Upfront commissions for investments.
- Ongoing charges.

## Can your super fund go bust?

(Update of CHOICE, August 2007, Hip Pocket)

The Australian Prudential and Regulatory Authority has taken enforcement action against the trustee and trustee directors of Strategic Capital Super Fund, which the article noted as having suffered financial losses. APRA never approved it to operate as a public offer fund — it operated without authorisation. If you'd like to know if a super trustee holds an APRA licence, go to [www.apra.gov.au/RSE/](http://www.apra.gov.au/RSE/).

## + TECHNOLOGY RECYCLING

## Get wise with e-waste

If you're wondering what to do with an unwanted computer, don't panic. There are plenty of ways to dispose of your old machine and stop it ending up as poisonous landfill. If it's in working order, it can usually be donated to a computer charity to be refreshed and reused. If it's past it, it can be recycled and the components reused.

CHOICE Online has a list of recyclers/refurbishers that accept old computers for disposal or reuse. Go to [choice.com.au](http://choice.com.au) and click on 'Computers', 'IT issues', then 'Computer recycling'. To find a local recycling centre, Planet Ark has a website called [www.recyclingnearyou.com.au](http://www.recyclingnearyou.com.au), where you can search for recycling options by product and area.

But the problem of electronic waste (e-waste) is huge. Greenpeace estimates that between 20 and 50 million tonnes of electronic waste is

discarded globally every year. And much of this potentially hazardous material goes into landfill, which can mean toxins end up in soil and water.

In Australia, there's no national voluntary collection and recycling scheme for dead computing and communications equipment. Individual manufacturers have their own recycling schemes — call yours to see if it provides one.

But there are encouraging signs that the industry is moving to address the problem. The Australian Information Industry Association (AIIA) has been working on a 'producer responsibility organisation'. This will manage an industry-wide scheme with the ambitious target of reducing computer waste in landfill to zero.

The AIIA's scheme would see a recycling fee built into the cost of new equipment, and companies will be able to choose to participate in

the industry scheme or administer their own. The scheme covers both computing equipment from known manufacturers and the unbranded or 'white box' machines that are often sold independently.

Recent figures suggest that just 3% of mobile phones are recycled. To address this issue, the mobile phone industry, through its representative body the Australian Mobile Telecommunications Association (AMTA), has its own recycling scheme. The Mobile Muster is a national scheme with 2000 drop-off points, and it's free for retailers and consumers. It's supported by most of the handset manufacturers and service providers. Go to [www.mobilemuster.com.au](http://www.mobilemuster.com.au) to find out more. ■

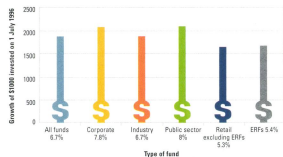


There are ways to dispose of your old computer and stop it ending up as poisonous landfill.

## + SUPERANNUATION

## Super fund returns compared

"Why don't financial planners recommend industry funds? It's because we don't pay commission."



Figures from the Australian Prudential and Regulatory Authority (APRA, see above) show the average annual returns for the five main types of super fund over 10 years from June 1996 to June 2006. It's notable that retail funds, open to any investor, were the worst-performing, at 5.3% pa. They were even slightly worse than eligible rollover funds, which hold lost and unclaimed super.

On average, the better performance of industry funds backed up their claims that they pay more to members by charging lower fees, by not paying commissions to financial planners, and because they're not-for-profit. Industry Super Network (ISN) said, "It begs the question, why don't financial planners recommend industry funds if they're providing better returns over 10 years? It's simple — because we don't pay commissions."

The Investment and Financial Services Association (IFSA), which represents wholesale investment managers, warns against decisions based solely on average returns. "Investors should put their money in a fund that suits their individual needs, and consider getting financial advice." But IFSA recognises that on average, the cost of advice can mean you're left with less money in the end. "The inbuilt cost of financial advice can detract from retail funds' investment returns." ■



## + ONLINE AUCTIONS

## Music to the highest bidder

**M**usic fans now have the option to bid for concert tickets — with eBay nowhere in sight. Ticketmaster has begun running its own online auctions ([www.ticketmaster.com.au/ticketauctions](http://www.ticketmaster.com.au/ticketauctions)), in a bid to curtail the unauthorised selling of event tickets. It claims the auctions have been a huge success in the US.

Auctions kicked off with The Police's 2008 reunion tour of Australia and New Zealand, which allowed consumers to bid the amount they'd be prepared to pay for the ticket in order to secure a premium seat.

At the conclusion of the auction, the highest bidders will be notified of their seat allocations and the amounts to be deducted from their accounts.

Ticketmaster says the revenue from these auctions will be reinvested into the industry, which "helps keep the live event industry stay healthy". So while consumers may or may not be paying more than they normally would for concert tickets, they can at least be confident that it's legitimate and that the revenue won't end up in the pockets of unauthorised sellers. For info on ticket scalping, see CHOICE, Aug 2007. ■



## + HEALTH

## HRT increases heart risk in older women

**H**ormone replacement therapy (HRT) can have a place in relieving symptoms in women going through menopause, and there's some evidence to suggest oestrogen-only HRT, started near menopause, may also decrease the risk of heart disease, breast cancer, diabetes and fractures caused by osteoporosis.

However, a recent study has shown HRT increases the risk of cardiovascular disease when older women begin taking it many years past menopause. Most women who take HRT are prescribed it when they start experiencing menopause symptoms, but researchers tested the idea that beginning HRT in older post-menopausal women might reduce major health problems, particularly cardiovascular disease. It found that, far from protecting them, HRT increased their risk.

This study hasn't answered major questions about the long-term benefits and risks of HRT therapy in women who take it from the onset of menopause — HRT's still controversial. But it does suggest that, for women way beyond menopause, starting HRT is far from risk-free. ■

**Far from protecting women who started taking HRT when they were older, it increased their risk of heart disease.**

## + PRODUCT SAFETY

## Take care with mercury



**Y**our prized collector's items could be a health risk. Mercury, a toxic, heavy, silver liquid, is commonly used in thermostats and thermometers, but it's also in some antique and vintage clocks, barometers, mirrors and lamps. Over time, the mercury in these may leak out, especially if the items are dropped, damaged or have worn seals.

Short-term exposure to a spillage shouldn't have health effects, as long as it's dealt with appropriately. Most mercury-containing antiques aren't a risk if they're sealed and handled properly.

There are also minute amounts of mercury in compact fluorescent (energy-saving) light bulbs (CFLs), so the advice below also holds if you break one of those. See *Shedding new light* on page 26 for more on CFLs.

### What to do

- Never vacuum up the spill with a household vacuum cleaner, as this may release airborne vapours.

- Immediately close off the room the spill is in.
- Ventilate the room and shine a light onto the area to find the mercury droplets.
- Wear gloves and old clothing that you can discard.
- Use an eyedropper to pick up any mercury droplets, or guide any droplets onto cardboard using a pen, and transfer them into a sealable container.
- Use powdered sulphur (which you can buy from nurseries) to draw the droplets together if they're in cracks or difficult to reach places, and use sticky tape to remove smaller residue.
- Put any items that have come into contact with the mercury in a plastic bag in the garbage. If mercury has seeped into the carpet, it can't be properly cleaned up and the carpet may need to be disposed of.
- Keep the room ventilated for 24 hours, and keep children and pets away from the area.

For more info, contact the Poisons Information Centre on 13 11 26, or your state Health Authority. ■

## + HOME THEATRE ON THE CHEAP

## Cheap and cheerful home theatre

There's a species of home entertainment product that's rarely seen in the lounge room, living instead in the study, kitchen or — if you're lucky — holiday home. In the past, these animals included the 34 cm TV and the cheap VCR with no remote. While not top-quality, they served a useful purpose when the full-blown home theatre experience wasn't required.

The TEAC MCDV10 and DGTEC Mini Combo TV are the latest evolution of the species, bringing cheap and cheerful home viewing into the 21st century.

Both models include an 18 cm LCD TV screen, digital TV tuner, DVD/CD player and FM radio. A USB connection so you can play media files, two speakers that would fit on a bookshelf and a remote control complete the set.

Aside from slight variations in the size of their buttons, both systems operate in exactly the same way.

Once you wade through the confusing array of initial setup screens, it's a fairly simple process to select the source you want — digital TV, DVD, radio, etc... and follow the menus accordingly.

The digital TV tuner is reasonably easy to operate and the picture quality on the LCD screen is surprisingly good for watching digital TV or a DVD, with a wide viewing angle and good resolution. You can also display movies on a larger TV screen via a component, S-video or composite connection. However, using either model to show video on anything larger than an 80 cm TV isn't recommended.

While you might get these systems to work with a portable TV aerial, the alternative is to install an



TEAC MCDV10 DM8501

Price \$299 • Manufacturer TEAC



DGTEC Mini Combo TV

Price \$299 • Manufacturer DGTEC

outlet to ensure a good digital TV signal. An analogue tuner is included with both sets in case you live in an area that's yet to receive digital TV.

The USB connection on the front panel allows you to play or display media files, such as JPEG photos, music MP3 files, and MPEG 1 and 2 video from a USB flash drive, MP3 player or digital camera. Digital Dolby audio is available through a digital coaxial connection; while the audio in general was reasonable, there was an overall lack of bass. On standby, both units consume over 6 W of power, which is very high compared with other TVs. However, as there's no clock to reset, you can simply turn it off at the power point when it's not in use. ■

Both sets have an analogue tuner in case you live in an area that's yet to receive digital TV.



## CHOICE VERDICT

Both models do everything they promise to do — at a reasonable quality and at under \$300, they provide a good secondary home entertainment option.

## + GPS WITH MULTIMEDIA

## Going with the Gogo

The TYCO Gogo CM310 is a very good car GPS; in fact, it's among the best we've tested. But is it the multimedia marvel the company claims it is?

As well as showing strong all-round performance on the road, the Gogo does exceptionally well in tunnels, plotting our vehicle's position even when we had driven 4 km with no access to a satellite.

However, the advertising clearly says that you can also use the Gogo to LISTEN (MP3 player), SEE (photo viewer) and WATCH (video player) as well as FIND (car GPS).

It plays MP3 and WAV music files, sure, but you have no control over the playlist or album selection, and the headphones and speaker performance are poor.

The photo viewer offers a clunky interface and shows only JPEG images, and the video player wouldn't show our standard AVI movie file.

While we're happy to recommend it as a car GPS, don't think of it as an iPod replacement or you'll be seriously disappointed.

If you've already bought the Gogo, registering the device is highly recommended: you get a 1 GB SD card and, more importantly, the latest software, which includes i-go car-nav software that's far superior to the originally supplied Destinator software. ■

Price \$599 Contact [www.gogo-plus.com.au](http://www.gogo-plus.com.au); 1300 784 322

## + SELF-HEATING COFFEE

**Convenient coffee**

Grab yourself a high-tech hot latte

**C**raving a hot coffee but there's no café in sight? Now, whether outside café hours or off the beaten track, you can pull out a self-heating container and minutes later be sipping on a steaming-hot latte.

A new self-contained, self-heating disposable coffee container uses an internal

heat chamber to bring the coffee to drinking temperature — a claimed 60–63°C — in five to eight minutes.

The recyclable container uses technology developed by US-based OnTech Operations Inc, at a claimed cost of \$20 million. The result is ingenious: you heat the coffee by triggering a chemical reaction in a separate internal chamber.

First, you turn the container upside down, remove a protective seal and press a plastic activation 'button'. This releases water into the heating chamber, which contains quicklime. The resulting combination produces heat, which in turn heats the latte mix in the outer chamber.

Wait 10 seconds, then turn the container upright again and wait until the heat-sensitive pink spot on the label turns white. Don't tip the coffee out into your favourite mug, though — it's meant to be drunk directly from the container, as the internal heat chamber keeps it warm for up to an hour.

What about the flavour? Taste is a personal thing, but our guess is that you won't be abandoning your usual café in favour of the self-heating coffee range. But it might be good to keep handy for emergencies.

The coffee is marketed in Australia under the PERKETT'S brand name and is distributed by BH Fine Foods. It includes four latte coffee flavours: mocha, hazelnut, French vanilla and double shot. You'll find the self-heating 281 mL containers on the shelves of Coles and Woolworths/Safeway stores nationally (\$3.99 recommended retail). BH Fine Foods plans to roll out teas, soups and hot chocolates in the same self-heating format. ■



Now you can have hot coffee anywhere in a self-heating container.

## + PHONE WITH TOUCHSCREEN

**A very clever touch**

**T**he HTC Touch is a smartphone with a 7 cm touchscreen, similar to that of the new Apple iPhone.

You can access the internet, email, send and receive SMS messages and play music and video files.

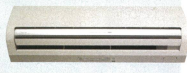
The HTC Touch is compatible with the GSM/GPRS mobile phone network in the 900/1800/1900 frequencies. It combines phone functions with office applications: you can use it to read and edit Word, PowerPoint and Excel files. It can also play MP3, AAC and WMA

music and WMV video files using Windows Media Player. There's a 2 megapixel camera and 64 MB of inbuilt memory — and if that's not enough for you, it also comes with a 1 GB microSD storage card for your extra files.

The phone connects wirelessly to the internet via Wi-Fi and has Bluetooth, which allows it to connect wirelessly to another Bluetooth-compatible device, such as a printer. It uses the Windows Mobile 6 Professional operating system, so it'll synchronise with Windows computers to update and transfer files. The HTC Touch retails for \$699. ■

**Coming ...****Air conditioners**

Ever-increasing numbers of Australians are getting air conditioning installed to get them through the hot summers. Use the upcoming CHOICE test to pick a model that's as energy-efficient as possible — and one that's reverse-cycle, to keep you warm in winter too.

**DVD/hard disc recorders**

Using a DVD player to play movies and a VCR for recording TV shows is so five years ago. If you think you've lingered too long in this technology time warp, you probably want an upgrade to a DVD recorder. Throw in a 160 GB hard disc drive as well, and you'll have hundreds of hours of recording capacity at your disposal. CHOICE's tests reveal the best.

**Fridges**

One side-by-side model in CHOICE's latest fridge test even has its own TV, and it's now common for extra-large fridges to have through-the-door water and ice dispensers. Some of them come with a pretty high price tag as well. Regardless of its price, though, no fridge does everything well. One brand-new \$4000+ Smeg model (pictured) doesn't even have automatic defrost in its freezer.



SMEG

## Write or email — we want to hear from you.

Your experiences help our research and often let other readers know about scams and rip-offs. Positive outcomes you've had to a complaint you took to a manufacturer, retailer, importer or tradesperson interest us too. See opposite for how to contact us.

### No Panasonic or Samsung?

■ I read with interest your 106 cm TV test (CHOICE, July 2007) but was disappointed to see you hadn't included Panasonic or Samsung models in the test line-up. After all these are the leading brands and would be, in my opinion, more comparable to Sony and LG than some of the others you included.

Richard, NSW

### CHOICE says

At the time we bought TVs for this test, the 106 cm Panasonic and Samsung models were in the process of being updated or replaced, and would no longer have been on the market by the time we published the test results. The TV market is moving very fast at the moment, and CHOICE is in the process of changing its testing in order to shorten the time between buying test samples and publication, while still providing solid test results. In this way we hope to avoid this problem of missing brands in future.



### Low-emission hot-water systems

■ I'm a CHOICE subscriber, but writing in this instance on behalf of the Technical Information Committee of CANWin, a climate action group operating in the Southern Highlands of NSW. We were very impressed by your cover story, *Flicking the green power switch*, in the June 2007 issue of CHOICE, and are recommending that all our members interested in green power read it. We attempted to write a similar note ourselves to guide people in our area, but there's no way we could match the comprehensive content and superb presentation you've achieved. We'll recommend our members visit the CHOICE website and use the 'single report' download facility.

Have you considered a report on low-carbon-emission hot-water systems, including solar, heat pump and gas (both storage and non-storage)? It's difficult to get good comparison information on these systems. Not only is the data on carbon emissions confusing (and in some cases contradictory — even from the Australian Greenhouse Office), but there's also some doubt as to whether the solar and heat pump systems work satisfactorily in cold climate zones. The public also needs to understand the rebates that are available, and what to do if they live in high-density housing.

As low-emission hot-water systems represent the single most effective way for ordinary citizens to reduce the carbon emissions from their homes, we feel it's very important to give the public good guidance in selecting a system suitable for their needs and their situations.

Graeme Sanders, NSW

**CHOICE agrees** This is an important issue and we'll take these comments into consideration for upcoming articles on carbon emissions. Thank you for your comments on our June 2007 article.

### Next G — "a quantum step up"



■ As a long-suffering rural subscriber, I have no particular affinity for Telstra, but for marginal reception areas, Next G is a quantum step up.

With previous CDMA and digital mobile phones, reception in our house in the Moree town area was only possible with a cable connection to a car-type aerial mounted on the roof guttering. We're about 3 km from the phone tower, which is

mounted on the local post office, but line of site is interfered with by three suburban street blocks of very mature domestic garden trees growing in a flood plain.

On the recommendation of a local phone dealer, we took a Next G handset home to try it. Absolutely amazing! We now have reception throughout the house, albeit with limited crackling interference ... no aerial, it just works!

Ron, Moree

**CHOICE says** For more information on Next G, see *Choice Cuts*, May 2007, or for a comprehensive guide, see the May/June issue of CHOICE Computer. To subscribe, call 1800 069 552 toll-free or go to [choice.com.au/magazines](http://choice.com.au/magazines).

### Fading problem

■ On your recommendation for dishwasher detergent (CHOICE, Jan/Feb 2007), we used Home Brand powder for about three packets, as the efficiency was as good as Finish and the price is much cheaper. But it has severely faded the colour patterns on our plates (Royal Doulton 'Summer Breeze', dishwasher-safe). Also, the inside of the machine became very scummy. We switched back to Finish powder and the results are much, much better. However, the damage to the plates can't be restored.

Patrick, NSW



**CHOICE spoke** to Royal Doulton, which recommends its tableware be washed either with liquid detergent or with Finish Powerballs, as its UK testing has shown these to be the least abrasive. It told us that customers should be given these care

instructions in the shop when they buy Royal Doulton china. However, as this is up to individual stores, some customers may not have received them. The company says it stands by its products and will replace any goods that were damaged as a result of the purchaser receiving inadequate care instructions — which is a win for Patrick.

Woolworths, which manufactures Home Brand, told us its dishwasher detergent contains the same type of chemical ingredients as other products sold in the dishwasher detergent category. It says the bleaching chemical in the product is sodium percarbonate, a colour-safe bleach, and although the pH of the product is slightly higher than the average dishwasher detergent, it doesn't make a difference to the stability of the crockery's dye.

As for scum build-up, Woolworths says that because Home Brand's formula has a lower level of phosphate than some products, it may not have enough sequestering power to overcome water hardness, which may result in a lime build-up. It says this can be overcome by using salt, following the dishwasher manufacturer's instructions.

CHOICE's trial only assessed the wash performance of the detergents, and didn't look at any effects these products might have on delicate crockery over time.

### Tip for sofa beds

■ Regarding sofa beds (in the August 2007 issue of CHOICE): a simple tip on how to make a sofa bed comfortable, even the cheap wire frame ones, is to place the leftover seating cushions in the space between the floor and the bottom of the wire frame, or trampoline. It makes a huge difference in comfort, as the foam cushions provide the support right where the mattress normally sags.

Since I discovered this simple trick, my relatives have had to resort to other tactics to accelerate my departure. So CHOICE readers should keep this tip to themselves!

Keith Harvey, NSW

## Thumbs up!

- Adam from Darwin bought a pair of hiking shoes from a Columbia footwear store; after two months, the rubber liner on the front of the shoes started falling apart. When he returned to the store, he found it had closed down. He contacted Columbia and was asked to return the shoes via an alternative Darwin supplier. Within two weeks he was sent a new pair.
- Julie from Hampton, Victoria, offers her Thumbs up to Onelink Transport Systems. When she found her lost monthly ticket after buying a new one at a cost of \$152.60, she applied for a refund — even though she knew she didn't fall into Onelink's General Refund Information and Conditions. Onelink promptly reimbursed her for \$133.76.
- Karen's GHD Professional styling iron stopped working just after the warranty expired. After reading of others' experiences in CHOICE, she decided to call GHD to see if it could be replaced. The next day, a postbag arrived in her letterbox to collect her broken iron, and after a further three days she received a brand-new one.
- Helen from NSW would like to offer her Thumbs up to Hasbro, the Australian distributor of My Little Pony. After her three-year-old's My Little Pony broke, Hasbro replaced the toy, even though she had no receipt.
- Colin from Victoria offers his Thumbs up to Cyclone Industries for its customer service. When the blade of his 10-year-old Heavy Duty Cyclone Pruner secateurs broke, his local Mitre 10 called Cyclone to see if it could get a replacement blade. Cyclone took Colin's address and sent him a brand-new blade at no charge.

Address your letters to **Thumbs up!** at the address on page 59.



## LETTER OF THE MONTH

### Dentist's advice

■ It's great to see the disgraceful lack of funding for the public dental service being given some exposure (CHOICE, July 2007). Regarding private health funds, one tip that has saved many of my patients (I'm a dentist) is for them to do their arithmetic very carefully before joining up. Quite a few people find out they would spend more in premiums than they receive in benefits. Please keep up the unbiased reporting.

**Mark Brisley**



PHOTO COURTESY OF MARK BRISLEY

To thank you for taking the time to write to us, CHOICE awards a prize of a CHOICE book to the 'Letter of the month'. This month's winner receives *How to Clean Practically Anything*, or any other book of his choice from the list on [choice.com.au/books](http://choice.com.au/books). We're sorry we don't have the resources to answer all your letters personally, and in the magazine we may edit them or print only an extract.



Email [letters@choice.com.au](mailto:letters@choice.com.au) or mail to:  
Letters, CHOICE, 57 Carrington Road, Marrickville 2204





# Moisturise with sunscreen

More women than ever now use a moisturiser with sunscreen. CHOICE's Home Testers tried 26 to see which they liked best.



## nutshell

► Unless a moisturiser with a sunscreen is applied properly, it's no substitute for a primary sunscreen. And if you're out in the midday sun, wear a hat, a shirt and sunglasses as well.

► You don't have to pay a fortune: one of the CHOICE trialists' favourite moisturisers costs just \$8.60 a jar.

**A**bout half of all skin cancers occur on the head and neck, as do most incidences of melanoma — the deadliest skin cancer. Exposure to ultraviolet (UV) radiation from the sun can also cause premature aging. UV protection is essential all day, every day, so is using a moisturiser with sunscreen a good idea?

The answer's yes, but with reservations. There's a danger that moisturisers containing sunscreen can lull us into a false sense of security. Why? Because we tend to use it like a regular moisturiser: that is, sparingly.

## Did you know?

**No moisturiser has so far been shown to turn back the clock.** No matter how expensive it is, nor how scientific-sounding its claims, a moisturiser can only keep your skin moist and reduce the appearance of fine lines.

**Dry skin doesn't cause wrinkles — exposure to the sun does.** UV radiation damages the skin's support structure, breaking down collagen and elastin, which causes wrinkles to form. However, dry skin can make any wrinkles you do have appear worse.

**Your skin can repair itself.** There's some evidence that avoiding the sun — which includes rigorous use of sunscreen — allows the skin to start repairing itself from at least some of the past damage done to it.

**Too much moisturiser** can make your skin look older — it keeps the old skin cells hanging around on the surface for longer, while the fresh, new cells lie waiting underneath. Try skipping it at night.

To get the full claimed protection, you'd need to use it like a sunscreen: apply it liberally (more than half a teaspoon at a time to the face and neck) and smear it on the skin rather than working it in; put it on at least 15 minutes before going out; and reapply it every couple of hours. Used like this, though, you'd be paying more than \$10 every time you applied SK-II Advance Protect Essence (\$175 for 50 mL — the most expensive on test).

As well as protecting us from cancer, sunscreen can reduce the signs of premature skin aging, such as wrinkling, rough skin, broken or burst capillaries, and uneven colouring. The sun is thought responsible for about 90% of the visible signs of aging among Australians.

## No substitute for sunscreen

In the past regulatory authorities didn't allow this sort of product (called a secondary sunscreen) to carry a specific SPF claim on the label, and the assumption was that most people didn't use it as their primary sunscreen. Now SPF claims are allowed, though, there are concerns that some people are using it as their primary sunscreen, but aren't getting the stated protection because they don't use enough.

However, if it's a choice between a regular moisturiser or one with sunscreen, it's better to wear the latter on an everyday basis. While the sun might not be fierce at the beginning and end of the day, UV radiation, in particular UVA, is still very much present. UVA, which penetrates more deeply into the skin than the 'burning' >

## What to buy


**L'ORÉAL PARIS Visible Results Daily Skin Perfecting Moisturiser SPF 15**

**Price** \$26.95/50 mL

**Trialist comments:**

"It's the complete package — texture, fragrance, absorbs well and moisturises. I loved it!"  
 "Delicate fragrance, smooth texture, absorbed well, make-up application great. Didn't make my skin oily or greasy."  
 "Felt expensive!"


**GARNIER Nutritionist Regenerating Daily Moisturiser SPF 15**

**Price** \$15.60/50 mL

**Trialist comments:**

"Didn't have any of that 'sun lotion' feeling."  
 "Liked this moisturiser because of its fragrance, easy absorption and nice silky feel."  
 "Perfect consistency, not too thin or oily."

**BEST BUY**


**DOVE Essential Nutrients Protective Day Cream SPF 15**

**Price** \$8.60/50 mL

**Trialist comments:**

"This was a lovely light moisturiser."  
 "Not overpowering, really nice base scent to start the day."  
 "Spread easily and evenly and absorbed quickly."

**BEST WITH SPF 30+**
**THE CANCER COUNCIL Moisturising Face Cream SPF 30+**

**Price** \$9.95/50 mL (actual container size is 75 mL)

**Trialist comments:**

"I thought on the first day this moisturiser was going to be too heavy on my skin — how wrong I was. By the third day I was impressed. Easy to apply without having to work it into my skin. Feels nice to wear and doesn't turn oily after several hours."  
 "Perfume good, worked OK as a moisturiser, but a sunscreen feel to it."  
 "It was very smooth and delicate. Felt nice on the skin — not oily, not smelly, not too thick or thin."



**"The L'Oréal Paris was the complete package — texture, fragrance, absorbs well and moisturises. I loved it!"**

**HOW WE TESTED**


**280 CHOICE Home**  
 Testers who regularly use a moisturiser and have 'normal' skin (not excessively dry or oily) each tried six unidentified facial moisturisers with sunscreen.

Trialists were instructed to test two moisturisers at

a time: one on their left cheek and the other on the right. Each moisturiser was tested for three consecutive days, at the end of which trialists completed a survey rating each moisturiser, and then moved on to test the next two products. Among the six

moisturisers each trialist was given to test, a control product was included to ensure rating consistency. In other words, two of the six samples were the same cream, and if the trialist didn't give them a similar rating, all their ratings were excluded.

Participants rated the following characteristics for each moisturiser:

- How much they felt it kept their skin from drying out.
- The ease of absorption.
- The feel of their skin after three days of use.
- The strength and appeal of the fragrance of the moisturiser.
- The appeal of the texture of the moisturiser.
- An overall rating for the moisturiser; this was a separate rating, not a combination of the others.

The trialists also told us whether they noticed any skin or eye irritation caused by the moisturiser.

< UVB, is responsible for aging and melanoma, so it's worth being protected all the time. Just use a proper sunscreen as well, particularly if you go out in the middle of the day, when UV peaks (between 10 am and 3 pm).

## Moisturisers with sunscreen on test

While the added protection of a sunscreen is a good thing, we wanted to know if it affects the quality of the moisturiser, including the way it feels when you put it on, how well it absorbs into the skin and the overall ability of the product to moisturise. So we asked CHOICE Home Testers to try 26 moisturisers with sunscreen, to see which, if any, they'd be happy to use every day.

The table shows how they rated the products for various factors. Perception of how well each worked

as a moisturiser, and its texture, are the two factors most closely related to how our trialists rated a product overall. Absorption and fragrance played a smaller part in determining the overall score.

There was no significant correlation between price and overall rating, so paying more for a prestige brand and glamorous packaging doesn't mean you'll be any happier with the moisturiser.

None of the six products with an SPF higher than 15 was among the top three products. The highest-rating brand with an SPF of 30+ (THE CANCER COUNCIL Moisturising Face Cream) came in equal sixth place. It could be that a formulation that gives the most effective sunscreening properties is slightly less likely to have desirable 'cosmetic' properties. ■

### TABLE NOTES

\* Price per 50 mL or 50 g was calculated from the prices we paid in April–May 2007.  
(A) Product labelled 'with sunscreens' but Elizabeth Arden has confirmed it has an SPF of 15.

| PRODUCT                                                                     | SCORES            |                            |                   |                      |                     | DETAILS |                        |                       |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|----------------------------|-------------------|----------------------|---------------------|---------|------------------------|-----------------------|
|                                                                             | Overall score (%) | Score as a moisturiser (%) | Texture score (%) | Absorption score (%) | Fragrance score (%) | SPF     | Size of pack (mL or g) | Price per 50 mL or g* |
| <b>Brand (in rank order; number of trialists in brackets)</b>               |                   |                            |                   |                      |                     |         |                        |                       |
| <b>L'Oréal Paris</b> Visible Results Daily Skin Perfecting Moisturiser (67) | 73                | 72                         | 85                | 88                   | 72                  | 15      | 50                     | 26.95                 |
| <b>Dove</b> Essential Nutrients Protective Day Cream (59)                   | 68                | 68                         | 66                | 78                   | 53                  | 15      | 50                     | 8.60                  |
| <b>Garnier</b> Nutritionist Regenerating Daily Moisturiser (64)             | 68                | 67                         | 74                | 80                   | 70                  | 15      | 50                     | 15.60                 |
| <b>Estée Lauder</b> DayWear Plus Multi-Protection Anti-Oxidant Creme (71)   | 66                | 68                         | 75                | 80                   | 71                  | 15      | 50                     | 76.00                 |
| <b>RoC</b> Hydra+ Multi-Protection Hydrating Fluid (53)                     | 66                | 68                         | 70                | 84                   | 67                  | 15      | 40                     | 43.75                 |
| <b>Lancôme</b> Bienfait Multi-Vital High Potency Moisturiser Cream (61)     | 65                | 67                         | 69                | 82                   | 68                  | 15      | 50                     | 89.00                 |
| <b>The Cancer Council</b> Moisturising Face Cream (67)                      | 65                | 67                         | 62                | 77                   | 64                  | 30+     | 75                     | 9.95                  |
| <b>Blooms The Chemist</b> Total-E Cream (57)                                | 64                | 65                         | 70                | 85                   | 55                  | 20      | 75                     | 7.95                  |
| <b>The Body Shop</b> Vitamin E Facial Day Cream (64)                        | 64                | 66                         | 65                | 84                   | 68                  | 15      | 75                     | 17.95                 |
| <b>Clinique</b> Superdefense Triple Action Moisturiser (59)                 | 63                | 64                         | 63                | 77                   | 42                  | 25      | 50                     | 90.00                 |
| <b>Johnsons</b> Daily Facial Moisturiser (58)                               | 63                | 66                         | 66                | 76                   | 56                  | 15      | 50                     | 7.50                  |
| <b>Natio</b> Daily Protection Face Moisturiser (63)                         | 63                | 61                         | 68                | 80                   | 66                  | 15      | 100                    | 6.50                  |
| <b>Olay</b> Complete Defense Daily UV Moisturising Lotion (60)              | 62                | 63                         | 62                | 78                   | 62                  | 30+     | 75                     | 9.25                  |
| <b>Elizabeth Arden</b> First Defense Advanced Anti-Oxidant Cream (69)       | 61                | 64                         | 66                | 76                   | 71                  | 15 (A)  | 50                     | 75.00                 |
| <b>David Jones</b> Vitamin E Protective Lotion (53)                         | 60                | 64                         | 60                | 78                   | 62                  | 15      | 120                    | 6.25                  |
| <b>Dior</b> HydraAction Visible Defense Hydra-Protective Light Creme (55)   | 60                | 63                         | 59                | 80                   | 68                  | 15      | 50                     | 95.00                 |
| <b>SK-II</b> Advanced Protect Essence (53)                                  | 60                | 61                         | 64                | 85                   | 48                  | 15      | 30                     | 175.00                |
| <b>Yves Saint Laurent</b> HydraFeel Soft Hydrating Water Lotion (78)        | 60                | 60                         | 57                | 83                   | 71                  | 15      | 50                     | 83.00                 |
| <b>Nivea</b> Visage Optimal Protection Daily Moisturiser (58)               | 59                | 62                         | 65                | 82                   | 64                  | 15      | 50                     | 16.00                 |
| <b>Clarins</b> Moisture Quenching Hydra-Care Lotion (60)                    | 58                | 61                         | 52                | 84                   | 55                  | 15      | 50                     | 74.00                 |
| <b>Simple</b> Regeneration Defending Day Moisturiser (55)                   | 58                | 59                         | 60                | 74                   | 40                  | 15      | 50                     | 17.95                 |
| <b>L'Occitane</b> Olive Daily Face Cream (64)                               | 57                | 61                         | 59                | 64                   | 62                  | 15      | 50                     | 39.95                 |
| <b>True Solutions</b> Total Age Protector (63)                              | 57                | 54                         | 50                | 73                   | 33                  | 30+     | 100                    | 25.00                 |
| <b>Dermalogica</b> Sheer Moisture (59)                                      | 56                | 57                         | 48                | 71                   | 49                  | 15      | 40                     | 87.50                 |
| <b>Neutrogena</b> Oil Free Moisture (62)                                    | 56                | 57                         | 54                | 80                   | 37                  | 15      | 115                    | 5.40                  |
| <b>Ultraceuticals</b> Professional Protective Daily Moisturiser (61)        | 56                | 56                         | 52                | 73                   | 47                  | 30+     | 100                    | 30.00                 |

# Heels under the microscope

Why does one shoe cost 12 times as much as another?



## NINE WEST

• \$140

**Materials** Leather upper, synthetic lining, resin sole.

## ANNE KLEIN

• \$425

**Materials** Leather upper, lining and sole.

## PAYLESS

• \$34.95

**Materials** Synthetic upper and lining, PVC sole.

### nutshell

► All three pairs of shoes are strongly constructed. The price went up relative to the quality of the materials used and the cachet of their label.

► Despite some 'wobbling' issues, the Nine West shoes represent the best value for money.

If you've ever lusted after a pair of designer shoes like *Sex in the City's* Carrie Bradshaw, you've no doubt come up with a long list of reasons why spending \$500 on some top-to-die-for heels is a good idea.

After all, you get what you pay for, right? CHOICE put this theory to the test by shopping for three almost identical pairs of shoes at widely differing prices.

We asked three experts to examine these classic women's heels — a \$425 pair from Anne Klein, a \$140 pair from Nine West and some \$34.95 cheapies from Payless. They all have a mid-level 5–6 cm heel and are the style of shoe many women wear on a daily basis.

### Pulled apart at the seams

The Sandler factory in Sydney puts all its footwear through rigorous testing, and invited CHOICE to use its specialised equipment. In short, our experts pulled the shoes apart to see what they were made of, looking at:

- The strength of heels, with a heel pull-off test.
- The strength and quality of the leather/synthetic material on the inside and outside of the shoe.
- The padding in the heel and toe area.
- The quality of the metal shank, which determines the shape and provides support.
- The strength of the adhesive used to bond the upper and sole together. >

### Meet the experts



Left to right: Casper Ozinga, Andrew McDonald and Tony Butler examine the three shoes.

**Casper Ozinga** Honorary Secretary of the Australian Podiatric Medical Grade Footwear Association and Managing Director of Comfort and Fit Australia, a NSW company that specialises in orthopaedic, comfort and speciality footwear.

**Andrew McDonald** designs and constructs handmade shoes. While he makes tailored shoes for any size of foot, he's also created specialised footwear for films such as *The Star Wars Trilogy* and *Mission Impossible 2*.

**Tony Butler** New Development Manager, Sandler Shoes Australia. He's been working in the design area of the shoe industry for 30 years.

Function was sacrificed for fashion — the design of the heel and the upturned toe resulted in a wobbly walk for wearers.

## What to look for

### TOE SPRING

The Nine Wests had a more exaggerated toe spring than the others, known as a 'Turkish-style' toe.

### SHOE SIZING

There's no universal shoe sizing. Australia adheres to the English and US standard, which says there should be an 8.2 mm difference in length between full sizes.



### SHANK

The shank provides structure and support.

## Anatomy of a shoe

**Construction** The unexpected result of our pull-apart test was that the Payless shoes were surprising well constructed. They withstood the heel pull-off test and were well bonded together, although our expert panelists noted some stray remnants of adhesive that should have been sanded off.

From a manufacturing point of view, the Nine Wests had the most sophisticated and well designed construction. The shank gives a shoe its strength and support. In this pair, it combined with a screw to secure the heel, and this proved to be the sturdiest construction of the three pairs. However, the function of the shoe was sacrificed for fashion — the design of the heel and the slightly upturned toe resulted in a wobbly walk for wearers (see *Shoe road test*, far right). The Nine Wests also had more padding in their heels than the others, but they possibly needed it to boost stability.

The Anne Kleins' construction was solid but not markedly superior to the others, which is surprising, as they're 12 times the price of the Payless pair.

## Uppers and soles

**Materials** The Payless shoes were entirely synthetic, and once you damage the vinyl, there's nothing you can do to repair them. The leather of the Nine Wests and Anne Kleins can be maintained with shoe polish.

The Nine Wests' cow-leather upper had a 'high shine' finish, which means the leather had been sanded and then coated with a layer of polyurethane — similar to the patent leather process.

The Anne Kleins were made of high-quality kid leather that not only looked good but felt soft. Unlike the others, its upper was made of just one piece of leather with only one seam at the back of the heel. The lining was also kid leather, which our road-testers found very comfortable.

**Soles** The soles of the Payless pair had anti-slip ridging but they were made of PVC, which will cause static electricity and heat up quickly. The Nine West soles were made of resin, with anti-slip ridging. Resin doesn't create static electricity like PVC and it also moderates hot and cold temperatures reasonably well.

The Anne Kleins were the only pair with leather soles, which will moderate extremes of hot and cold more effectively. Leather soles wear out more quickly than synthetic ones and can be slippery, but on the upside, they can be repaired. The experts thought a half-sole could easily extend the life of these shoes.

## Style over comfort

**Cushioning** While the Anne Kleins and Nine Wests had better padding in their heels than the Payless, the experts noted that none of the shoes had sturdy cushioning material such as cork in the toe/ball area. This would make them more comfortable.

## Leather is better

Our experts will tell you that leather shoes are better for your feet. They wick away perspiration, whereas most synthetic shoes will leave your feet bathed in their own sweat — not only uncomfortable, but smelly.

There are different grades of synthetic materials and some even have pores to allow your feet to breathe. Unfortunately it's impossible to tell which is which just by looking at it, but it's a fair bet to say, when it comes to materials, that you get what you pay for.

Shoes with a leather lining will stretch and mould to your feet, so they'll ultimately be more comfortable. Synthetic linings have little give, so your feet will just push against them until they eventually disintegrate.

As for leather soles, it comes down to personal preference. Some people love them, while others find rubber soles more comfortable and practical.





## Shoe road test

Before we tore the shoes to pieces, a few willing CHOICE women took the three different pairs for a roadtest around the office.

- **An expensive look** We covered up the labels and asked people to pick which shoe they thought was the most expensive. Most picked the Payless.
- **Wobbly** The heels on the Nine West pair caused the wobbles for our trialists. Our experts weren't surprised, saying that the smaller surface area of the heel and the upturned 'Turkish-style' toe were to blame for this instability. However, seasoned heel wearers may not find it a problem. The Anne Kleins and the Payless felt far more stable by comparison.
- **Flat to the floor** For both looks and comfort, trialists preferred the way the toe on the Anne Klein and Payless pairs sat almost flat to the floor, unlike the Nine West's slightly upturned toe.
- **Crushed toes** The Anne Kleins were bit tight in the toe department, but their high-quality leather quickly started stretching to fit the wearer. The Nine West and the Payless shoes were roomier in the toe area.
- **Sweaty** Because the Payless were entirely synthetic, they noticeably made trialists feet sweat.
- **Size matters** All three pairs were a size 8, but the Payless were wider and longer than the other two pairs. The Anne Kleins and the Nine Wests were similar in length but the Anne Kleins were also narrower, so felt smaller to some trialists.
- **The favourite** The sleekness, and the quality and softness of the leather on the Anne Kleins made them a favourite, but wearers confessed they wouldn't be prepared to spend \$425. ■



## BUYING TIPS

We wear shoes every day but may not know how best to make them comfortable and healthy for our feet. And while style is a matter of personal preference, the best way to judge the comfort of a shoe is by trying it out in a shop. Bear in mind that:

- It's best to buy shoes in the afternoon, because your feet tend to swell towards the end of the day.
- Always try on both shoes — it's rare for both your feet to be exactly the same size.
- Walk around in them — your foot should fit snugly at the heel and instep.
- Don't rely on shoes stretching after you've bought them; they may not. Shoes with a leather upper and lining are more likely to, but a US study revealed that most women surveyed were wearing shoes that were too small for them.
- Ensure you have 5–10 mm of room between your longest toe and the tip of your shoe.
- Because our feet sweat, it's a good idea to rotate the shoes you wear on a daily basis. This will give your shoes time to dry out, which will prolong their life.
- Women experience more foot problems than men, often due to wearing high heels.
- Because leather is kinder to your feet than vinyl, take a close look at what the shoes you're lusting after are made of — you can get full leather shoes (uppers and lining) for a lot less than our \$425 Anne Kleins. You might even find them around the \$140 mark — comparable to the Nine Wests, which didn't have a leather lining.

## CHOICE verdict

Our expert panellists thought the range of prices reflected the range in quality: the more expensive the shoes were, the better quality their materials. But in terms of construction and strength, all three pairs were similar.

- Despite the Nine Wests' wobbling issues, the panel thought they were the best value for money. The leather upper was likely to last longer than the Payless vinyl. Their synthetic lining won't be as comfortable as a leather one, but at \$285 less than the Anne Kleins, you might think the compromise is worth it. Look for a full leather shoe (uppers and linings) for the same price as the Nine Wests — that would be the ideal.
- The Payless shoes would be fine for wearing out every now and then, but on a day-to-day basis your feet will be better off in leather shoes.
- The softness, leather quality and sleek look (complete with toe cleavage) of the Anne Kleins rated highly. This pair would be the best for your feet because they're leather inside and out. But at \$425, you pay for that privilege — as well as for the prestige of the designer label.

# The great cheddar revival

Your local supermarket now has some good vintage cheddar cheese with sweet, nutty flavours and a moist, crumbly texture.



## nutshell

► You'll find some excellent traditionally made vintage cheddars in delis at \$40 or more per kilogram, but our expert tasters rated some much less pricey supermarket-bought brands just as highly.

► Some brands labelled as 'vintage cheddar' are in reality club cheeses, made by forming milled cheese into a block under pressure.

**C**heeddar's back in style. This classic English variety has recovered its reputation as a fine cheese, with good cheddar worthy of taking its place on the cheese board alongside brie, stilton, Roquefort, gorgonzola, Emmenthaler, camembert, parmesan...

For many years, cheddar was the victim of its own success. Adaptation of traditional methods to mass production gave us cheap but truly awful cheese with little resemblance to real cheddar. But now you'll find some really good vintage cheddars, even in the big supermarkets.

## Expert advice

CHOICE bought 35 nationally available brands of vintage cheddar. Two of them (ASHGROVE Traditional Cloth Matured Cheddar and MAFFRA Aged Rindled Cheddar) are available only from delis, but you'll find the others in larger supermarkets. All of them are produced in either Australia or New Zealand.

Our experts (see *Meet the expert tasters*, page 20) judged each cheese on its flavour, aroma, texture and appearance. They were looking for cheese with a lingering taste, a sweet, nutty flavour, and a texture that's moist and slightly crumbly. The cheddars listed in *What to buy* (right) are those that got the top scores overall.

The two traditional cloth-matured cheddars (ASHGROVE Traditional Cloth Matured Cheddar and MAFFRA Aged Rindled Cheddar) scored well but were the most expensive cheeses in the test. You don't have to go to a deli, though, and you don't have to spend that much

money, to get top-quality cheddar. You'll find two of the top-scoring cheddars — MAINLAND Vintage and SOUTH CAPE Vintage (black label) — in most supermarkets at well under \$20/kg.

With cheeses from smaller brands, there can be batch-to-batch variations. The same type of cheese from the same brand won't necessarily taste exactly the same next time you buy it. For testing, we bought the cheeses from supermarkets or delis, just like any consumer, and so only tasted that particular batch of cheese.

## Club cheese

Not all cheddars are the real McCoy. Some are 'club' cheese — made by milling ordinary cheddar and forming the pieces back into a block under pressure. It can be a blend of different cheddars, and some club cheeses have flavours (such as onion or pepper) added to them.

We included some club cheeses in this test, as a separate category (see the table, page 21, for details). They have a smooth, creamy texture, very different from that of traditional cheddar. The experts took this into account when awarding scores.

Not all club cheeses, though, are identified as such on the label. The experts said JINDI Vintage, WATSONIA Old Style Vintage Original and RAP Creamy Vintage are also club cheeses. JINDI told us it doesn't consider its product to be a club cheese because, although it's milled, it isn't heat-treated. But whatever your definition of 'club' cheese, it's not the same as traditional cheddar and this should be clearly stated on the label. >

## What to buy

**ASHGROVE TRADITIONAL CLOTH MATURED****Price** \$55.95/kg**Tasters' comments**

A good cheddar, with good flavour and characteristic texture, though slightly sour.

**ASHGROVE VINTAGE****Price** \$26.40/kg**Tasters' comments**

Good flavour and aroma, though slightly bitter. It has an attractive crumbly texture that's characteristic of vintage cheddar.

**COBRAM PREMIUM VINTAGE****Price** \$25.20/kg**Tasters' comments**

A nice clean flavour, but a slightly rubbery texture.

**MAFFRA AGED RINDED****Price** \$39.50/kg**Tasters' comments**

Good flavour and aroma, with a nice crumbly texture, though slightly dry.

**MAINLAND VINTAGE****Price** \$15.55/kg**Tasters' comments**

A good flavour, though slightly sour, with a grainy texture.

**SOUTH CAPE VINTAGE****Price** \$14.75/kg**Tasters' comments**

A good cheddar, though a little thin on flavour and aroma, with a slightly weak body.

## Did you know?

Quince paste goes really well with a good vintage cheddar, and with cheese generally.

Quinces came originally from the Middle East, where they were cultivated even before apples, so they have a long history. Quinces may have been the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden as well as the Golden Apples of the Hesperides, which Hercules was required to steal from the gods as his eleventh labour. Quinces were also associated with Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of love, and in Ancient Greece they were a ritual offering at weddings.

Most varieties of quince are inedible unless you cook them, but when cooked they develop a rich fruity flavour and a lovely dark red colour.

Quince paste isn't a standard supermarket item, but you'll often see small tubs of it in delis. It's made from quinces and sugar but, as one of our expert tasters told us, "It's a paste, not a jam. Look for the brand with the most quince and the least sugar."

A paste's percentage of quinces should be stated on the label (where the ingredients are listed). The level of sugar is more difficult to gauge — all you can do is compare the figure for 'sugars' in the respective jars' nutrition information panels. Note that this figure includes fruit sugar from the quinces as well as sugar that's been added by the manufacturer.



Adapting traditional methods to mass production gave us cheap but truly awful cheese with little in common with real cheddar.

## Meet the expert tasters



**Neil Willman**

Master cheesemaker, industry consultant and educator, Neil is a specialist in cheese technology, and conducts cheesemaking and cheese judging courses through his own company, Cheese Expertise.



**Carolyn Scott**

Carolyn has Advanced Certification in Cheese Grading and Judging. She runs Honeysuckle Markets in Newcastle and regularly serves as a judge for the Royal Agricultural Society of NSW (RAS) in the Fine Food and Dairy Section.



**Peter Moss**

Peter has Advanced Certification in Cheese Grading and Judging and regularly serves as a judge for the RAS. He runs the Udder Indulgence Cheese Company, which supplies benchmark Australian and imported cheeses.



**Russell Smith**

Cheese consultant and educator, Russell provides cheese training and education for retailers and consumers. He conducts cheese appreciation courses and is a regular contributor on cheese to the *Canberra Times*.

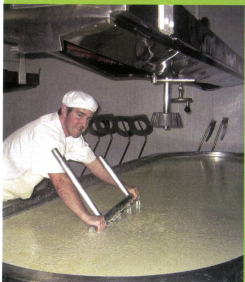


**Peter Commins**

Peter studied Dairy Technology, and started cheese grading and tasting in 1982 as a steward and then as a judge for the RAS. He's a field officer with the NSW Food Authority, auditing food safety programs in the dairy industry.

## Making an artisan cheddar

We've all experienced mass-produced cheddar with a rubbery texture and bland flavour, but now there's a return to traditional 'artisan' cheddar. What makes the difference? The essential ingredients and methods are much the same, but differences in quality can be attributed to four critical steps:



Once the vat has set, it's cut into curds and whey using wire frames. Photo courtesy of Ashgrove Cheese.

**1 The quality of the milk** Freshness and how the milk has been handled are important, because microbiological contamination can affect the flavour of the cheese.

**2 The quality of the starter culture** Special bacteria that produce lactic acid, and enzymes (rennet or a bacterial equivalent — see *For vegetarians, right*) are added to milk to make it set, much like yoghurt. The species and strains of bacteria used in the starter culture can affect the texture and flavour of the matured cheese.

**3 The method used for cheddaring** The curd is gathered together and kept warm under pressure, after removal from the whey. Whether it's done industrially or by more traditional methods can affect the flavour and texture of the cheese.

**4 The maturation time** During maturation, bacteria and enzymes break down some of the milk protein, changing the rubbery texture of immature cheese into the firm, close texture of mature cheddar. At the same time, the cheese develops its special flavour and aroma. Some manufacturers state how long their cheese has matured for on the label. Mild cheddar generally matures for about three months; mature cheddar is left for at least nine months; and vintage cheddar could have been maturing for up to two years.



It's not a good idea to freeze cheddar; freezing tends to give it a dry and overly crumbly texture.

| PRODUCT                                        | SCORES            | DETAILS                                    |
|------------------------------------------------|-------------------|--------------------------------------------|
| Brand (in rank order)                          | Score (out of 20) | Maturation time (months) Price per kg (\$) |
| Ashgrove Traditional Cloth Matured (A)         | 17                | min. 15 55.95                              |
| Ashgrove Vintage                               | 17                | 24 26.40                                   |
| Cobram Premium Vintage                         | 17                | ns 25.20                                   |
| Maffra Aged Rinded (A)                         | 16.5              | 18–24 39.50                                |
| Mainland Vintage                               | 16.5              | up to 18 15.55                             |
| South Cape Vintage (black label)               | 16.5              | 12 14.75                                   |
| Bega Strong and Bity Vintage                   | 16                | ns 12.70                                   |
| Cracker Barrel Extra Sharp                     | 16                | up to 20 16.60                             |
| Cracker Barrel Special Reserve Vintage         | 16                | up to 36 19.70                             |
| Farmers Union Old Bity Vintage                 | 16                | ns 11.40                                   |
| Mainland Special Reserve Extra Tasty           | 16                | up to 18 17.45                             |
| Tamar Valley Vintage                           | 16                | 18 26.50                                   |
| You'll Love Coles Vintage                      | 16                | ns 11.98                                   |
| Capel Valley Traditional Vintage               | 15.5              | ns 26.65                                   |
| Devondale Special Reserve Premium Aged Vintage | 15.5              | 18–24 10.15                                |
| Westacre Australian Vintage (Aldi)             | 15                | ns 9.40                                    |
| Woolworths Select Vintage                      | 15                | min. 12 14.35                              |
| Black & Gold Matured                           | 14.5              | ns 8.85                                    |
| Capel Valley Vintage Red                       | 14.5              | ns 23.95                                   |
| Cracker Barrel Classics Farmhouse Style        | 14                | up to 36 24.95                             |
| Mainland Cheddar Master's Epicure              | 14                | up to 36 23.90                             |
| Mainland Cheddar Master's Vintage              | 14                | up to 30 25.90                             |
| South Cape Extra Tasty (red label)             | 14                | 9 19.95                                    |
| The Margaret River Dairy Company Vintage       | 14                | ns 27.50                                   |
| Jindi Vintage (B)                              | 13.5              | 18 26.60                                   |
| King Island Dairy Surprise Bay                 | 13                | 12 31.75                                   |
| Watsonia Old Style Vintage Original (B)        | 13                | ns 33.25                                   |
| RAP Creamy Vintage (B)                         | 12.5              | ns 29.95                                   |
| <b>CLUB CHEESES</b>                            |                   |                                            |
| Capel Valley Vintage Club Traditional          | 15.5              | ns 19.95                                   |
| The Margaret River Dairy Company Club          | 15.5              | ns 29.95                                   |
| YEA Vintage Club                               | 15                | min. 12 24.95                              |
| Emporium Selection Original Club (Aldi)        | 14                | ns 21.45                                   |
| Mersey Valley Vintage Club Original            | 14                | ns 19.05                                   |
| Mersey Valley Vintage Club Classic             | 13                | ns 19.05                                   |
| Tilba Club Tilba Vintage                       | 13                | ns 32.80                                   |

### < Wrapped in plastic

Cheddar cheeses coated with red, yellow or black wax look beautiful, but in fact they're no better or fresher than cheese that's merely wrapped in plastic film — and no more authentic. All the top-scoring cheeses in this test were wrapped in plastic (even the two cloth-matured cheeses came with plastic film around the outside).

Once opened, cheddar is best stored in a sealed container or in plastic to prevent it from drying out. Manufacturers usually flush the packaging with carbon dioxide to prevent mould growing, but once opened, cheese can go mouldy. Don't eat mouldy cheese: some moulds produce toxins that can cause cancer. It's probably safe if you can cut off the mould with at least 1 cm of the cheese underneath it — otherwise toss it all out. ■

### TABLE NOTES

**Scores** The experts tasted the cheeses (without knowing the brands) and agreed on a score following a 20-point system similar to that used in judging cheese shows — a maximum of 10 for flavour and aroma, 6 for texture and 4 for presentation.

**Price** This is based on what we paid in Sydney in June 2007.

ns Not stated

(A) Available only from delis.

(B) A club cheese, but this wasn't declared on the label.

### FOR VEGETARIANS

Most cheese is made using rennet extracted from the stomachs of slaughtered newborn calves, but you can get some that's made with rennet of non-animal origin. Enzymes that function much like calf rennet can be produced by fermentation using special strains of the fungus *Rhizomucor miehei*. Genetically engineered bacteria have also been developed that produce an enzyme (chymosin) identical to the main active component of calf rennet.

Nine of the cheeses in this test are made using non-animal rennet:

- ASHGROVE Traditional Cloth Matured.
- ASHGROVE Vintage.
- CAPEL VALLEY Traditional Vintage.
- CAPEL VALLEY Traditional Vintage Club
- COBRAM Premium Vintage.
- DEVONDALE Special Reserve.
- DEVONDALE Australian Vintage.
- WATSONIA Old Style Vintage Original.
- WOOLWORTHS SELECT Australian Vintage.

COBRAM and the two DEVONDALE cheeses don't mention non-animal rennet on the label, but the manufacturer told us they're made using an enzyme of non-animal origin. THE MARGARET RIVER DAIRY COMPANY says it uses non-animal rennet 95% of the time, but can't guarantee it.



# Saving water in your home

Our current patterns of water use have to change — you can spend just a few bucks... or do even more with a few hundred.



## nutshell

► Plenty of ways to reduce your water consumption, including water-saving tips, *What to buy* lists for water-efficient products, and lots of other water-saving product innovations.

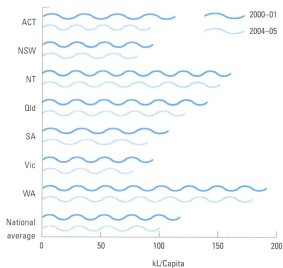
► This article focuses on inside your home; a later one will look at installing a rainwater tank and using greywater from showers, handbasins, etc. in your garden.

**I**n November 2006, 16 of the 24 major cities in Australia had water restrictions in place, ranging from limits on garden watering to a complete ban on outdoor water use. And despite the Australian Bureau of Statistics reporting a decrease in household water use over the last few years (see right), a combination of population growth and climate change pretty well guarantees that water availability isn't going to improve if we maintain our current patterns of use.

However, there is hope. Water experts reckon that by reducing water use, we could delay or even completely avoid the need for new water provision infrastructure (for example, new dams or desalination plants), and even lift restrictions. The reductions needed are about 20% from pre-restriction levels (2001) for Brisbane, Perth, Adelaide and Canberra; about 27% for Sydney; and 35% for Melbourne.

The Savewater! Alliance ([www.savewater.com.au](http://www.savewater.com.au)) has put a number to the target: we need to reduce our water consumption by 50 litres per person per day. So, where can you start?

## Reducing annual water usage, state by state



Source: ABS Water Account 2004-5

### WHAT IT TAKES

We've indicated in the story what most of the water-saving actions you can take will cost you and how big a job it will be.

### Key

- \$ Less than \$10
- \$\$ Less than \$100
- \$\$\$ Less than \$1000
- \$\$\$\$ \$1000+

### Scale

- ★ Shopping trip
- ✓ An action you can easily take
- Small job/DIY
- ! Medium-large job

## Make your house water-wise

### Top tips for taps

**1** Install water-efficient taps, known as aerators, which give the feel of a high flowrate with only half the water. They're simply screwed onto the end of a tap and reduce the flowrate while aerating the water.

**2** Turn off the tap when brushing your teeth. It seems so obvious, but many people still leave the water running, wasting at least 5 L per minute: that's around 11,000 L per person per year.



### Top tips for showers

**3** While waiting for the shower water to warm up, save the cold water in a bucket and use it for the garden, pot plants, laundry soaking, washing your hands or even flushing the toilet. The RIPPLE bucket (pictured; see [www.rippleproducts.com](http://www.rippleproducts.com)) is handy because it folds up for you to store out of the way. You can also use it to scoop water out of the bath and onto the garden. A pack of two (a 6 L and a 9 L bucket) costs \$14.95.



**4** Shaving your legs in the shower adds about four minutes to your shower — that's 36 L with a water-efficient shower head. Consider waterless hair removal, such as waxing or an epilator — see the article in CHOICE, September 2007.

### Top tips for dishwashers

**5** You can save water by not rinsing plates before putting them in the dishwasher. CHOICE tests each dishwasher's washing performance by getting it to wash a load of dishes and cutlery coated with food that's been left to dry on overnight. As most machines now effectively get these clean on a 'normal' program, there's no need to waste water by rinsing plates before you stack — just scrape the food scraps off first.



**6** If you do pre-rinse (because you don't run the machine every day), try using the dishwasher on its 'fast' program, which uses less water. You're likely to find it washes just as well.

### Saving water: The toilet

**\$\$\$ !** Replacing your whole toilet may not be worthwhile unless you're renovating the bathroom. But if you do, make sure you get a modern 6/3 L (or 4.5/3 L) dual-flush cistern and pan.

**\$\$\$ !** If you have an old-style single-flush toilet, you can fit it with a 9/4.5 L dual-flush cistern. Cisterns for 6/3 L flushes can't be fitted to an existing 12 L pan — they require one that's specifically designed for lower flush volumes.

**\$\$\$ !** If replacing your cistern isn't an option, you could install a device to stop the toilet flushing when you take your finger off the button — so you hold it down only for as long as it takes to flush the contents of the bowl away, saving any unnecessary flush water. They cost as little as \$10 and can be installed by the home handyperson.

**\$\$\$ !** If you're not very handy or you're renting, you could just use the old 'brick in the cistern' trick: put a brick (or a plastic bottle full of water) in the cistern and you'll use less water for each flush.

### Wash your hands in eau de toilette

**\$\$\$ !** The CAROMA Profile ([www.caroma.com.au](http://www.caroma.com.au)) toilet has an integrated handbasin. Water flows from the tap when you flush the toilet, giving you enough time to wash your hands, then drains into the cistern ready for the next flush. It saves not only water but space — great for when the loo's separate from the main bathroom. However, as the tap's only activated when you flush, it doesn't fully replace a bathroom vanity. It costs \$500 plus installation, and should be available later this year.

**\$\$\$ !** OZ AQUASAVER has a retrofit cistern basin comprising a basin, tap and plumbing hardware, available for \$295. You (or rather a plumber) simply set it on top of your existing cistern, and unlike the CAROMA Profile you can turn the tap on when needed — the excess will go out the cistern's overflow. See the website for more: [www.ozaquasaver.com](http://www.ozaquasaver.com).

### Saving water: The shower

**\$\$\$ !** It's easy to save water in the shower by making a few simple changes: cut your shower time to four minutes or less, get a water-saving showerhead (see page 24) and install an easy on/off switch (like the EVERY DROP Shower Saver, page 24).

If you don't want to change your showerhead for decor reasons, you can install a flow restrictor. Even getting a shower timer can help reduce the amount of time spent showering by making you more aware of how long you're taking: the average shower is about seven minutes, but it doesn't have to take that long to soap up and rinse off.

## Did you know?

### LOOK FOR THE LABEL

The mandatory water efficiency label displayed on water-using appliances allows you to compare the water efficiency of different products. Each label shows a star rating out of six for the product — the more stars the better. It also shows a water consumption or water flow figure, which is based on laboratory tests.

Since July 2006 it's been compulsory for all new domestic washing machines, dishwashers, showers, toilets, urinals and most taps to display the label. You might still see some unlabelled dishwashers and washing machines until the transition period expires on 31 December 2007. Secondhand products and products imported into Australia for personal use aren't required to have a WELS (Water Efficiency Labelling and Standards) scheme label.

Water-efficient products will help you save water and (when you're using hot water) energy — and therefore money. It's estimated that by 2021, Australians could save more than \$600 million on water and energy bills by using more efficient products.



**By 2021, we could save an estimated \$600 m on water and energy bills by using more efficient products.**

### Install a water-efficient shower head

**\$\$\$** **CHOICE** had 16 trialists test 15 showerheads costing \$20–\$132; they weren't told the showerheads were water-efficient. Overall they were satisfied with most of the showerheads they tested. The models in the *What to buy* list (opposite) rated particularly well, and only one model scored very poorly.

The most common complaint about the showerheads was that the water pressure was too weak, even among some of the highest-scoring models. But there were some notable exceptions. The DELRANA LUXURY SHOWERS Marlin Rose was praised for its stronger water pressure — and, at \$34, it's also one of the cheaper models in the test. The NOVELLI TAPWARE Riviera also has good water pressure and scored well overall, though it's just outside the *What to buy* list.

Instantaneous hot water systems (and some gravity-fed systems) may not have a sufficient flowrate for these showerheads to work properly. Check with the retailer to see if your system is suitable.

See the full report in *CHOICE*, March 2007, or go to [choiceextra.com.au](http://choiceextra.com.au).

### Give water wasting the flick

**\$\$\$** **!** The EVERY DROP Shower Saver is a lever that you can install at the base of your shower stem, allowing you to stop and start the flow of water quickly and easily. The idea is that you can stop the shower running while you're soaping up, shampooing or shaving, and then turn the water back on to rinse when you're ready. The manufacturers reason that since soaping up takes more time than rinsing, you could save about half your normal shower water with the paddle-shaped device.

It costs \$48 (plus postage and handling) and can be purchased from the company's website ([www.showersaver.com.au](http://www.showersaver.com.au)). It doesn't suit all showers, so check yours is compatible before you buy.

### Love a long shower?

**\$\$\$\$\$** **!** If you're renovating your bathroom, you might consider installing a QUENCH shower. After you've soaped up and rinsed off, 4 L of clean water is recirculated through the system for as long as you care to stand there.

QUENCH showers retail from \$2995. See the website for more information: [www.quenchshowers.com](http://www.quenchshowers.com).

### Take the No Shampoo Challenge

**\$\$\$** **✓** Earlier this year, ABC radio personality and newspaper columnist Richard Glover set out to discover whether he could live without shampoo, thereby allowing the natural oils in his hair to regain their balance and give him lovely fluffy hair. Hundreds of listeners joined him in the challenge, using only warm water to vigorously rinse their hair as necessary, and at the end of the six-week trial, 86% decided their hair was great.

How long do you spend shampooing your hair, rinsing it out, then putting conditioner in and rinsing that out? Two minutes? Three minutes? Five minutes? By taking the No Shampoo Challenge you could save time, water and the money you'd spend on shampoo.

### Saving water: The dishwasher

**\$\$\$\$\$** **★** As we noted in the August 2007 issue, dishwashers these days generally use a lot less water than they used to — even less than washing dishes by hand in the sink. The average water consumption for the 10 machines *CHOICE* tested this year was 17.6 L. Conservative estimates of hand washing show at least 20 L is used; less conservative scenarios go as high as 90 L (presumably involving lots of running water being wasted).

If you're in the market for a new dishwasher, the models in the *What to buy* list, far right, were recommended in our latest test. We've also listed their water usage there. As you can see, the top two are the

least thirsty (15 L per wash) but also the most expensive. The LG, ELECTROLUX and WESTINGHOUSE come in at under \$1000 and use only slightly more water (18 and 19 L respectively). For full details, see CHOICE, August 2007, or go to [choiceextra.com.au](http://choiceextra.com.au).

### Saving water: The washing machine

**\$\$\$** Front loaders typically use a lot less water than top loaders. They can be more expensive, but you may be entitled to water retailer rebates.

However, if you prefer the convenience of a top loader, the 8 kg FISHER & PAYKEL Aquasmart WL80T65CW1 uses 76 L of water per 'normal' wash — less than half a typical top loader, and more like a front loader. However, like many top loaders, it doesn't score well for gentleness.

Some washing machines rate well for water efficiency at the expense of rinsing well. If you choose a washing machine for its water efficiency according to the WELS label (see *Look for the label*, left), you might be disappointed when you use it. Luckily CHOICE comes to your rescue by testing the machines for rinse performance too. The models in the *What to buy* list, right, are from our September 2007 test and scored well for both water efficiency and rinse performance.

### Reusing washing machine water

We commissioned a chemical analysis of laundry detergents to determine their suitability for use on the lawn or garden in greywater from your washing machine.

The ones that got clothes cleanest were generally too high in sodium, salinity and pH (alkalinity) to be much good for your garden, especially over the long term. And unfortunately most of those safest for the garden didn't wash clothes very clean.

So don't use the wash water on your garden, just the rinse water, as the worst of it will have gone down the drain. And spread the water over a wide area, keeping it off your herbs and vegies, and your garden should be OK.

See CHOICE, April 2007, for more about detergents.

### Using water to dry with

Combined washer/dryers may seem a great idea, especially if you're pushed for space, but they use a lot of water for drying, thanks to their condenser technology. Instead of turning the water in the clothes into hot, damp air, they condense the steam back to water and send the lot down the drain — using a lot of water to do so. The LG Combined Steam Washer and Dryer we tested recently (CHOICE, August 2007) used 107 L to wash 9 kg, and 74 L to dry 5 kg (it can't dry a full wash load in one hit).

A front loader with a normal dryer on top is just as space-saving, almost certainly more water-efficient and

probably cheaper, but you need to be able to vent the hot, damp air from the dryer out of your laundry.

### Saving water: The hot water system

**\$\$\$** If you have taps a long way from the hot water system, chances are you waste a lot of water letting the cold water run through before it warms up. A hot water recirculation system intercepts the cold water before it goes out the tap and pumps it through the cold water inlet into the hot water tank. So when you want hot water, you activate the system (by pushing a button), and once the thermostat detects that the water is warm enough, the pump switches off, you turn the tap on and hot water comes out. The pump uses very little energy, as it's only on for those few seconds when you need it.

We came across models ranging from around \$450 to \$900 (plus installation). They're more elegant — though more expensive — than using a bucket! ■

### What to buy \$

#### IN THE KITCHEN

|                                         |        |
|-----------------------------------------|--------|
| MIELE G 1220SC (15 L)                   | \$1649 |
| LG LD-1204W (18 L)                      | \$999  |
| AEG F40760 Favorit Sensorlogic (25 L)   | \$1099 |
| AEG F86080UM Favorit Sensorlogic (23 L) | \$1599 |
| WESTINGHOUSE SB915 (19 L)               | \$949  |

#### IN THE LAUNDRY

|                                                              |        |
|--------------------------------------------------------------|--------|
| BOSCH Maxx Lifestyle Exclusive WAE26470 (7 kg, front loader) | \$1599 |
| BLANCO BFWM7 (7 kg, front loader)                            | \$1199 |
| ELECTROLUX Ultra Silencer EWF1495 (8 kg, front loader)       | \$1689 |
| BOSCH Logixx WBB24750 (9 kg, front loader) (A)               | \$2899 |
| FISHER & PAYKEL Aquasmart WL80T65CW1 (8 kg, top loader)      | \$1199 |

(A) Discontinued, but may still be available in some shops.

#### IN THE SHOWER

|                                               |       |
|-----------------------------------------------|-------|
| FUTURA SatinJet Wall Shower Upswept Arm       | \$132 |
| FLEXISPRAY Bermuda II Wall Shower Fixed Arm   | \$34  |
| METHVEN Olympic 3000 Hi-Rise 1 Function       | \$88  |
| DELORANA LUXURY SHOWERS Marlin Rose Fixed Arm | \$34  |
| DORF Stayfast Universal Shower                | \$48  |
| GRACOTT Crys on Arm                           | \$202 |

# Shedding new light



To cut greenhouse gases, most light bulbs as we now know them will be off the shelves by 2010, replaced by energy-efficient compact fluoros. What do you need to know about CFLs?

Energy-efficient compact fluorescent light bulbs (CFLs, shown here on the CHOICE testing rig) come in different styles and sizes, with bayonet or Edison screw fittings. Some are larger than standard incandescent bulbs, but the swirly/twisted/spiral designs can be very compact, and are more like a traditional bulb in terms of light distribution. Those with a spherical cover — more like standard bulbs in appearance — take a little longer to reach full brightness and absorb some light, but they distribute light better.

## nutshell

► CFLs are a better choice for the environment than standard incandescent bulbs.

► You can't buy a CFL for all your household lighting options yet, but the industry is working to meet all needs in time for the changeover.

**S**tandard incandescent light bulbs are set to be phased out from 2009–10, to be replaced by energy-saving compact fluorescent light bulbs (CFLs). More commonly known as long-life or energy-efficient bulbs, they save you money and energy because they last much longer and use a lot less energy than normal incandescent bulbs. They now cost around \$5–\$20, depending on type. So to replace, say, 10 incandescent bulbs with CFLs will probably cost you around \$70, an amount you'd be able to recover in energy savings after one to two years, or in areas where lights are used a lot, in much less time.

Contributing to your savings is their longevity. CFLs are claimed to last between 6000 and 15,000 hours, compared with 1000–2500 hours for an incandescent

bulb. So if you burn a 6000-hour CFL around five and a half hours a day, it should last for around three years. And over this time, it'll consume about a quarter of the energy an incandescent bulb uses.

## It's not all sweetness and light

The lighting industry is currently working on solving some technical problems in the lead-up to the phase-out. Here's an update on the issues CHOICE readers have asked us about.

- According to environmental consultant Alan Pears, "A folded tube-style CFL must be used in a suitable light fitting, with a reflector or light-coloured inner surface. In many existing light fittings, it will seem dim to users." This tube-style CFL produces maximum brightness at the side of the bulb; in a light fitting that's not well designed (one that absorbs light or where the bulbs are installed vertically), end-on they may only produce half to three-quarters the brightness of an incandescent bulb.
- Manufacturers are developing special **dimable** CFLs that should become more widely available in a few years. At least one (from GE) is already on the market.
- The **start-up time** for most modern CFLs has been

## Did you know?

- Up to 90% of the energy an incandescent (standard) light bulb uses is wasted, mainly on heat.
- Lighting represents around 12% of Australia's domestic greenhouse gas emissions.
- Globally, electric lighting generates emissions equal to 70% of those from all passenger vehicles.



reduced to 0.1–0.5 seconds (at room temperature), and warm-up time to almost full brightness to about one minute.

- CFLs generate much less heat and some small designs should fit more easily into **enclosed light fittings**, but they're unsuitable for use in downlights because there's insufficient space for air circulation (see below for more on halogen downlights).
- **Outdoors** they're suitable if labelled accordingly or installed in an enclosed, weatherproof light fitting, but very hot or cold conditions can lessen their light output, and humidity can shorten their life.
- CFL technology is generally compatible with modern, relay-switched **motion sensors** or **electronic timers**, but frequent switching in short cycles can reduce the bulb's life. That's why some manufacturers advise against use with these devices.
- CFLs no longer only emit a cold blue light, but a **range of light colours** (see the photo, page 26). The colour is expressed in Kelvins (K) and should be listed on the packaging. Warm white (similar to an incandescent bulb) is 2700–3000 K, cool white is 4000–5000 K and daylight 6400–7000 K.

### How many watts?

For brightness equivalent to that of an incandescent, manufacturers generally advise dividing the wattage by five — for example, replacing a 60 W incandescent bulb with a 12 W CFL. But many people find this isn't bright enough; to ensure adequate light, we'd divide by four and replace the bulb with a 15 W CFL.

There's no quality standard in place yet that you can use as a reference point when buying bulbs. The industry and government are currently involved in the development of an international standard, which is planned to include performance standards inscribed on the light globe. But it's still a few years in the coming.

### What about halogen downlights?

If you have a new or recently renovated home, chances are you have halogen downlights. The problem with

### FREE LIGHT BULBS

Switching to energy-saving bulbs might cost you no money at all. Various companies that trade in carbon credits or work with other business partners offer households free or subsidised CFLs. You 'pay' by signing over your energy savings to the company, to sell to industry. So keep an eye out for free bulb offers in shopping centres, at fairs and home shows, or check with your local council, energy provider or environment agency.

these is that they're often installed in large numbers. So although they're slightly more efficient than standard light bulbs, they're by no means low-energy.

To save energy with halogen downlights, you could remove some where you don't need full brightness, or replace 50 W with lower-wattage bulbs. Newer infrared (IR) halogen lamps are more expensive (around \$10–\$20), but are claimed to be brighter and last longer.

For 12 V halogen downlights with a transformer in the ceiling, compact fluorescent retrofit kits are available and CFLs are being developed. Dimmable micro CFLs for 240 V halogen lamps are already on the market.

### Toxic mercury

CFLs contain a small amount of mercury, a toxic metal. The amount is minute — about a fifth of that in a watch battery. It's in gaseous form, sealed in the glass tubing, and is no danger in normal use. Take care removing a bulb from its packaging, and hold it by the base for installation.

Check with your local council or state government whether CFLs are part of a hazardous waste collection, or ask CFL retailers — some take them back for recycling. As a last resort, dispose of them in a sealed bag with your garbage. When CFLs are dumped in landfills, mercury can pollute the air, soil and waterways and collect in organisms and food chains. In other places, including New Zealand and the EU, recycling to avoid pollution is mandatory, but there are no laws here that require retailers to collect CFLs for recycling. ■

**CFLs use less energy and last longer: you'll recover the cost of the bulbs in energy savings in one or two years.**

## CHOICE verdict

The environmental benefit of the phase-out of inefficient lighting has been widely publicised, but CFLs aren't without impact — they use more energy to produce and contain mercury, which could spell problems if it's not recycled. So what's the overall verdict?

A lifecycle analysis of CFLs published last year in *The Environmental Engineer* concluded that CFLs are the better choice for the environment, mainly because of their much more efficient use of electricity. As for the mercury they release at the end of their life, the analysis found that the production of incandescent lamps contributes five times more mercury from burning coal for electricity. This was even the case in Tasmania, where hydroelectricity dominates, although involving much smaller quantities.

Environment groups are generally supportive of the initiative overall. "CFLs are not completely green in every way, but on balance they have a much lower impact than incandescents," according to the Australian Conservation Foundation.



## It's sold!

Selling your property for the price you want can be full of traps. CHOICE looks at how to find a good real estate agent and avoid the pitfalls.

### nutshell

- ▶ Don't choose an agent just because they give you the highest estimate of the value of your property.
- ▶ If you're selling, research the property market yourself to determine what your property is worth.

A real estate agent's primary focus is winning the contract to sell a property you want to put on the market. Getting your business is the hard part; in comparison, selling your home can be easy. So, bearing this in mind, who should you believe when you ask agents to assess your property's value? You'll certainly get a variety of answers and price ranges, and even though you'd expect agents' opinions about the market value of properties to differ a bit, particularly for unusual properties or those in rising markets, how much of this is agents' genuine disagreement and how much is part of the sales tactics?

For a start, going with the agent who gives the highest estimate (in some states only licensed valuers can give a 'valuation') could be a mistake. While the national real estate industry body says it's misleading and deceptive conduct for agents to misinform prospective vendors about their property's estimated selling price, agents told us the exaggeration of property values to sellers is a practice that's still ingrained in the industry.

And CHOICE's spot-check of agents' quotes (called a 'shadow shop') found a wide range in the estimates some agents gave for the same property; in some cases, participants in the shadow shop felt the overestimation of property values was to get their business. In other cases, if the shadow shopper had sold at the lower range of values agents suggested, they would have made a very costly mistake.

### CHOICE 'shadow shop' of estimates

Our shadow shop included 10 volunteers, all of them planning to sell a property, from various states and territories. Each spoke to three or more real estate agents and received market value assessments from them. In most cases, different agents provided different estimates for the same property. The table above shows the results, and here are some examples in more detail:

- Lisa got the impression that the highest quote she received — which was \$150,000 above the lowest — was an attempt to get her business with an unrealistic quote. "We feel he may have overpriced our property, possibly to gain the contract," she says. "A number of the same agent's properties of a roughly comparable standard in the area have been priced high, haven't sold, and the asking price has been reduced after a few months."
- Sheryl received an estimation of \$350,000 from one agent, and "low to mid 400s" from another. The property was advertised at \$420,000 and eventually sold for \$398,000.
- Lizzy received appraisals ranging from \$200,000 to "\$320,000 to \$340,000" — the highest estimation was between 60% and 70% more than the lowest.

Selling your property can be a very testing and emotional time, so you really need to have your wits about you. CHOICE finds the best ways to get an accurate market value assessment and pick a good agent.

## CHOICE'S SHADOW SHOP OF ESTATE AGENTS' MARKET VALUE ASSESSMENTS

|                     | First agent             | Second agent          | Third agent         | Range of estimates (lowest to highest) | Biggest range of estimates from the same agent | Advised price       | Sold for        |
|---------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|---------------------|----------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|---------------------|-----------------|
| <b>Seller 1 (A)</b> | Maybe \$500s            | Mid \$500,000s        | \$500,000–\$550,000 | \$50,000                               | \$50,000                                       | \$520,000           | \$469,000       |
| <b>Seller 2</b>     | High \$300s, low \$400s | \$410,000–\$450,000   | \$430,000–\$460,000 | \$70,000                               | \$40,000                                       | \$390,000+          | \$440,000       |
| <b>Seller 3</b>     | \$350,000               | Low to mid \$400s     | \$375,000–\$395,000 | \$100,000                              | \$50,000                                       | \$420,000           | \$398,000       |
| <b>Seller 4</b>     | \$215,000               | \$220,000–\$225,000   | \$215,000–\$219,000 | \$10,000                               | \$5,000                                        | Decided not to sell | Not applicable  |
| <b>Seller 5</b>     | \$550,000–\$650,000     | \$635,000–\$645,000   | \$480,000–\$580,000 | \$170,000                              | \$100,000                                      | \$640,000           | Hasn't sold yet |
| <b>Seller 6</b>     | \$400,000–\$420,000     | \$380,000–\$400,000   | \$430,000–\$450,000 | \$70,000                               | \$20,000                                       | Decided not to sell | Not applicable  |
| <b>Seller 7</b>     | Low to mid \$400s       | \$390,000–\$410,000   | \$400,000           | \$60,000                               | \$50,000                                       | Decided not to sell | Not applicable  |
| <b>Seller 8</b>     | \$320,000–\$340,000     | \$245,000–\$260,000   | \$200,000           | \$140,000                              | \$20,000                                       | Decided not to sell | Not applicable  |
| <b>Seller 9 (B)</b> | \$880,000–\$900,000     | \$750,000–\$800,000   | \$850,000–\$880,000 | \$150,000                              | \$50,000                                       | \$870,000           | Hasn't sold yet |
| <b>Seller 10</b>    | \$850,000–\$890,000     | \$950,000–\$1 million | \$925,000–\$975,000 | \$150,000                              | \$50,000                                       | \$950,000           | \$960,000       |

## Start with research

Before you meet agents, do your own market research to help determine the value of your property and the state of the market. Keep a close watch on property ads and websites for recent auction and sale results. Agents will also provide lists of their recent sales. Another option is to pay for a report: Home Price Guide, for example, sells Postcode and Property reports (both \$59.95) and Street reports for \$99.95 (go to [homepriceguide.com.au](http://homepriceguide.com.au) for sample reports). The Real Estate Institute of Australia says agents should also provide this kind of information to prospective vendors.

The next step is to get out in the field. Act like a buyer and visit properties for sale in your area, to get an idea of how your property compares, its value and the current state of the market. This helps you to assess the market value agents suggest, and to have a sense of whether they're over or underestimating your property's value.

Another reason to visit other properties for sale is to assess agents' answers to questions such as "why is the owner selling?", "how negotiable are they on price?" and "how long has the property been on the market?". This gives an indication of how agents field these tricky questions.

## Interviewing agents

Selling without an agent is an option if you have the knowledge, confidence and ability to negotiate prices and contracts — and the time required. It will also save you thousands of dollars on agents' fees. But if you don't want to go it alone, the first step is to make sure any agent you consider is licensed in your state.

Each state and territory has education and eligibility criteria for licensed or registered estate agents. Most states require continuing professional development programs too. But in general, the hurdles for entry to the industry (such as qualifications) are a lot lower than for a profession like, say, accountancy.

Contact your relevant state government department, listed in *Did you know?* on page 31. It seems like an obvious thing to do, but a recent NSW Fair Trading survey found that under 10% of sellers first checked if their agent was licensed.

Make appointments to see at least three agents; compare their market appraisals to get a better sense of what your property's worth. Also take this time to evaluate agents' personalities, sales experience, achievements and professionalism. Check the credentials and qualifications of the person you meet; they could be a salesperson under the agent's authority with less training and qualifications.

Don't rush into making a decision about which agent to go with. While most of our shadow shoppers didn't experience pressure to sign an agency agreement during their meetings, many people engage the first agent they visit, and some are then stuck with a sole or exclusive agency for a set period, even if they're not happy with it. See *Signing an agreement* on page 31 for more.

## Avoiding the 'quote trap'

Warren McCarthy, Managing Director of LJ HOOKER, says his company opposes the practice of agents overpricing to get a vendor's listing, but agrees that some agents quote high prices to try to get sellers to sign up. "This still exists but is not ethical conduct," he says. >

## TABLE NOTES

Our assumption is that 'low \$400s', for example, means \$400,000 or slightly higher, 'mid \$400s' means \$450,000, and 'high \$400s' means around \$490,000.

(A) A fourth agent didn't provide a figure; a fifth agent gave an estimate in the high \$400,000s. (B) A fourth agent gave an estimate of \$850,000 to \$900,000.

## Big differences

Daniel from Tasmania received a wide range of estimates for his property. The difference between the lowest and highest figures in the range was \$170,000.

He felt one agent grossly underestimated his property. "Initially, a value of \$420,000 was suggested. The agent watched our reaction carefully, and when I suggested he return to the office and prepare a written appraisal, he immediately suggested he had underestimated and the value would be closer to \$450,000. When we continued to insist on this in writing, he became embarrassed and apologised for making such a foolish mistake. His later appraisal was very vague and not in writing."

Several representatives from another agency came to value the same home a week later, and all differed significantly in their appraisals. "This time, the range was \$550,000 to \$650,000," Daniel says. "None of the appraisals was based on factual research, such as rates, relevant comparisons and land values. It was all based on the agent's 'considered opinion'." A third agent provided an estimate range of \$635,000 to \$645,000, after more thorough and diligent research, according to Daniel.

At the time of writing, the property is on the market for \$640,000.



PHOTO COURTESY OF DANIEL

**"There's an old saying in this industry that the biggest liar gets the job. Get a quote in writing."**

< "Sellers should be wary of the agent who overprices. If the agent is trying to woo business by giving an inflated price, you know they're out for themselves and not the client." Michael Ramsay Property, a buyer's agency that also provides services to sellers, agrees. "Agents are still inflating prices to get the seller's business."

Neil Jenman, former owner of a real estate agency, turned author, industry educator and the owner of a property referrals business, says avoiding the "quote trap", where agents inflate their valuations to get your business, is a top priority for sellers.

"There's an old saying in this industry that the biggest liar gets the job," he says. "The number one reason that agents give high valuations is to avoid losing business. The best way to protect yourself from the quote trap is to have the agent sign a quotation guarantee. This means getting the quote in writing, and signing an agreement stating that the agent won't be paid unless that price is achieved."

One way to try to find the real worth of your home is by hiring an independent valuer. A valuation is different from an agent's assessment, which is sometimes little more than an off-the-cuff estimate. An independent valuation is a professional estimation of the value of a property by a registered valuer, for a fee of around \$500.

### Properties can be undervalued too

The range of estimates received can also be due to agents underestimating the value of your property. There's a risk that some agents are looking for a quick, easy sale and commission. But unfamiliarity with your property or area, or poor judgment, could be other reasons for a low estimate. This shows the importance of getting a second, third, even fourth opinion, and ensuring you include local agents. One CHOICE shadow shopper, for example, says one agent grossly underestimated his property (see *Big differences*, above).

## Fourth time lucky

Lisa from WA received a wide range of estimated selling prices and was finding it hard to choose between agents, but persistence paid off in the end. "After interviewing four agents in total, we realised we needed something that would definitively differentiate them, as the prices suggested were so varied," she says. "We went back to all the agents and requested additional information to help us make our decision. We collected data on a combination of recent sales in the area, length of time on the market, initial listing price versus actual sales price, marketing campaigns (with special attention paid to internet advertising), whether or not they would work with other agents, and their fees, to finally determine who we'd use."

Lisa ended up choosing the fourth agent she interviewed. "His knowledge of the local area is very good and he'd had a number of recent sales in the area. He explained his costs and let us know straightaway that negotiation was possible, as we were in a price bracket that allowed it."

Although her house hadn't yet sold when we went to print, Lisa says her experience so far has been good. "The agent has worked hard and shown a lot of interest. He's approachable, personable, has a good sales history, knows the area and also has the backing of an experienced sales team."



PHOTO COURTESY OF LISA

## How much commission?

Agents generally charge between 2% and 3% of the sale price in fees; that's \$10,000 to \$15,000 for the sale of a \$500,000 home. This rate usually doesn't include advertising costs, which can range from several hundred dollars to thousands, depending on the type of ad, advertising rates in your local or chosen media, and where the ads are placed.

However, agents' fees can be structured in different ways:

- Some agents charge a higher commission — up 5% — which includes some advertising.
- You might be charged on a 'no sale, no fee' basis or, at the other extreme, be up for signage and advertising costs regardless of whether your property sells.
- Some agents have low flat fees. Satisfy yourself that you'll still achieve a good price through such agents, and that their focus isn't just a cheap, quick sale.
- A scale of commissions may be charged, particularly for more expensive properties. For example, you might be quoted 2.5% on the first \$850,000, and 10% after that. This provides a further incentive for the agent to achieve a higher price, and not a quick sale for a lower amount.
- You may be able to pay a lower commission by sharing some marketing and promotion costs.

Don't pay an upfront fee; only pay your agent after the sale is completed. Also, some states require that all fees, including advertising, are set out in the agency agreement. And it's important to know that all commissions and fees are negotiable. This might not always be obvious from the agent — one shadow shopper received a marketing proposal that suggested commission rates in Queensland are set at a particular level, for example. In fact, there's a maximum commission in Queensland, but aside from that commissions vary and are negotiable.

According to Graham Joyce, President of the Real Estate Institute of Australia (REIA), you should pay a fee commensurate with the service you receive. If you'll be paying top dollar, expect to receive a full marketing plan.

## Signing an agreement

The three main types of agency agreement are:

- **Open listing or general authority** Sellers can list with more than one agency, only paying commission to the agent that sells the property. While you may get more market coverage than with a sole agency, the sale of your property may not be as high a priority for the

agents, compared to the other types of agreements. There's also a risk that you won't achieve the best price if various agents are competing for a quick sale.

- **Exclusive authority/agency** The agent gets paid upon sale, even if the sale ends up being by a different agent or by the vendor themselves. One trap is to sign up for a lengthy contract: a CHOICE reader, for example, told us how he signed up for six months with an agent and regretted it later. Why not try one month first, and extend the agreement if you're satisfied?
- **Sole agency** Similar to the exclusive agency, except the agent may not be entitled to commission if you sell the property yourself.

Don't feel pressured to sign up after your first meeting. One shadow shopper told CHOICE about an agent she met: "He wanted us to sign a contract there and then, without my husband and I having discussed it. I told him he could talk as much as he liked but we wouldn't sign anything until we'd discussed it privately."

Some states have a cooling-off period for agency agreements; some also have a limitation on the time for which an exclusive or sole agency can run. >

## Did you know ?

You can't do too much research. Each state government's fair trading authority provides free advice to home sellers and buyers, or links to this information. Agents and their professional associations are worth a look too (the Real Estate Institute of Australia's website, [www.reia.com.au](http://www.reia.com.au), has tips for sellers and links to state and territory associations). Here are the government links:

- **ACT** [www.fairtrading.act.gov.au](http://www.fairtrading.act.gov.au)
- **NSW** [www.fairtrading.nsw.gov.au](http://www.fairtrading.nsw.gov.au)
- **NT** [www.nt.gov.au](http://www.nt.gov.au)
- **Queensland** [www.fairtrading.qld.gov.au](http://www.fairtrading.qld.gov.au)
- **SA** [www.ocba.sa.gov.au](http://www.ocba.sa.gov.au)
- **Tasmania** [www.consumer.tas.gov.au](http://www.consumer.tas.gov.au)
- **Victoria** [www.consumer.vic.gov.au](http://www.consumer.vic.gov.au)
- **WA** [www.docep.wa.gov.au](http://www.docep.wa.gov.au)



**"He wanted us to sign a contract there and then. I told him we wouldn't sign anything until we'd discussed it privately."**



**"A sales pitch isn't worth much unless it's backed up by solid evidence and a trusting rapport with the agent."**

### < Take control

You don't have to accept the contract agreement an agent presents — you're strongly advised to have it checked by a lawyer and changed if necessary.

One of our shadow shoppers even drafted a set of 'special conditions', modelled on Neil Jenman's Home Seller's Protection Guarantee (available at [www.jenman.com.au](http://www.jenman.com.au)). These conditions aim to prevent the agent from quoting an inflated price to get the contract, and provide some level of protection for the seller.

"We retained control of the process rather than handing it over to the agent," our shopper says. "We asked our solicitor to check the exclusive sale authority and the special conditions for 'gotchas' and to ensure that they expressed our intentions."

### Private sale or auction?

This is one of the more contentious areas. Some agents think the best price is achieved at auction, where high emotion, pressure and competitiveness among buyers can lead to higher prices. Others take a totally opposite view and say that private sale is the way to go.

Ask different agents to explain their views and the pros and cons of each approach for your situation. There are no hard and fast rules about which types of property are more suited to an auction or private sale, but some of the advantages of each for sellers include the following. (Thanks to the REIA for some of these tips.)

#### Benefits of auction

- Competitive bidding, which means there's no price limit. This can be good for unusual or particularly desirable properties that are hard to price.
- A definite sale, assuming the reserve price is reached.
- A set date for sale encourages potential buyers to act quickly.
- Identifies the most suitable buyers to negotiate with, if a sale isn't completed at auction.

#### Benefits of private sale

- More time to consider buyers' offers.
- Potential buyers make offers 'blind', without knowing what others are prepared to pay.
- Advertising expenses for private sales can be lower than for auctions. For example, one shadow shopper was given comparative costs for his property of around \$9500 for an auction, compared to \$1605 with a private sale. A more typical cost for the advertising and marketing of a property for auction is \$4000 to \$5000.
- No auctioneering fees. ■

## PICKING AN AGENT

Check that any agent has given you the following:

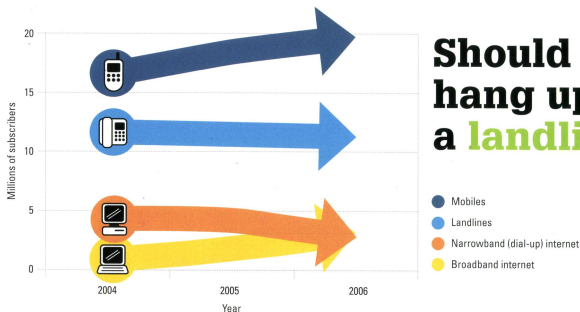
- Evidence of sales success in your area.
- A market value assessment that appears accurate, when compared to your research and perhaps on an independent valuation too.
- Signed market value estimate or even a price guarantee.
- A comprehensive marketing plan.
- Advice about steps to take to make your property more attractive to buyers.
- A commitment to provide you with regular reports and updates.

### CHOICE SHADOW SHOPPERS' ADVICE

We asked CHOICE's shadow shoppers for their tips about choosing an agent, after their meetings and interviews. Here are some of their responses:



- "Know the market and don't just rely on the sales gloss the agents present. Do as much research as you can in the six months leading up to the sale."
- "We had all documents checked by our solicitor before signing them."
- "You can barter on the agent's commission."
- "Check the agent's membership of a professional association and that the agent is certified."
- "Get a local agent. Our impression was that an agent from a different suburb undervalued our property, as he hadn't much sales experience in the area."
- "A sales pitch isn't worth much unless it's backed up by solid evidence and a trusting rapport with the agent."
- "Vendors must know what their property is worth before going with an agent, and if the potential agent's valuation is way under or way over the known worth, steer clear of that agent!"



## Should you hang up on a landline?

### nutshell

► You're probably paying \$30 per month for line rental, but do you really still need a fixed phone line?  
 ► Don't ditch your landline before reading CHOICE's tips (page 34). For example, will you be able to make calls in a power blackout?

The landline's role as a permanent fixture in our homes is under threat. In a 2006 Newspoll survey commissioned by VODAFONE, 40% of respondents said their mobile phone was their main point of contact, and 22% would get rid of their landline if they moved. And the official figures from the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) confirm that while the take-up of mobile phones and broadband internet services has exploded, fixed lines are slowly going in the opposite direction. An emerging group of tech-savvy consumers want their communications to be cheap, mobile and wireless — not shackled to a copper line.

### Big bang theories

In recent years, residential landlines have decreased by over 100,000 per year. As the graph above shows, in the three years to June 2006:

- Landlines overall decreased by 3% to 11.3 million. TELSTRA's residential landlines decreased by 7%. However, later figures show a turnaround in the year to June 2007, with 54,000 new landline connections.
- The number of payphones on our streets decreased by 10% to 58,230.
- Mobile phones increased by 20% to 19.8 million. There are now about 8.5 million more mobiles than landlines in Australia.
- Broadband internet services increased by a massive 267%. At over three million connections, broadband connections now exceed 'narrowband' (dial-up) internet connections by about 380,000.

Many people who abandon their fixed line choose a mobile instead. "We're seeing young adults (18–35) using a mobile as their primary form of communication," says IDC AUSTRALIA, a telecommunication and technology research company. "This is especially true for economic

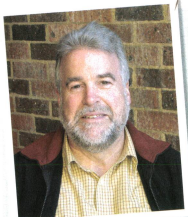
reasons — much of this age group can't afford to have both a mobile and fixed line."

But there are other services competing for a piece of the telecommunications pie: the transition from dial-up to broadband internet is driving the take-up of alternative means of communication, including email, instant messaging and Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP). VoIP lets you make and receive free or very cheap calls over broadband internet, and experts predict its use is set to explode. While you still need a landline for an ADSL broadband connection, a fixed telephone line isn't required for cable or wireless broadband connections.

### Alternative 1: Internet phone calls

If you have ADSL, cable or wireless broadband internet, VoIP lets you make and receive calls through your computer. There are over 100 companies providing these services to residential customers. You need to think about:

- Voice quality** According to the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA), the quality of voice calls from some VoIP providers can match or exceed that of a fixed line and mobiles, but there's a lot of variation. PHONECHOICE says wireless broadband isn't good enough for VoIP — to use it effectively you need ADSL or cable broadband.
- Broadband requirements** For the best voice quality, you need a fast internet connection: 512 kbps is generally considered the minimum.
- Download limits** If you're on a restricted internet usage plan, you'll have to take into account the limits on downloads too. If your connection is 'shaped' (slowed down) when you go over your monthly usage limit, it could be difficult to make calls over the internet at the slower speed. Talking non-stop for one minute over the internet takes up about 180 to 600 KB. >



## VoIP lacking in voice quality

After shopping around for ADSL2+ internet providers that don't charge for uploads, David from Victoria decided to switch from TELSTRA to a bundled package of services from EXETEL, an OPTUS reseller. While he kept his landline for personal use, he switched to VoIP for his office phone.

"The office phone was converted to VOIP, which costs \$5 per month, plus 11 cents for untimed calls to anywhere in Australia," David says. "However, there have been some quality problems with VoIP — people I call experience a bad echo for the first few seconds of each call. There's also a connection delay, meaning you often talk over each other — a bit like an international call in the 1980s."

But overall, David's happy with the new service. In the first month since switching, he says his monthly bills for phone and internet dropped from around \$180 to \$100.

"Overall I'd give the service level a big tick, but I wouldn't recommend it for a non-technical person," he says. "The company does provide some support, but expects you to have reasonable technical nous to carry out the investigations and implement fixes. For a non-technical person, I'd recommend a company that provides full tech support."

### BEFORE YOU DITCH YOUR LANDLINE

If you're thinking of getting rid of your landline, there are a few things to ask your new provider, whether it's a mobile phone or VoIP provider, before you make the switch. (Thanks to PHONECHOICE for its help with these tips.)

- **Emergency calls** Ensure that if you call emergency services from your landline substitute, your address can be checked in the same way as 000 calls from landlines. ACMA has proposed changes to oblige VoIP providers to give free 000 calls (many already do), while you can also make free emergency calls from mobiles.
- **Calls during a blackout** Can your substitute handset still operate without mains power? Your mobile will only last as long as its charge, and computers need power too.
- **Is a contract required?** Some mobile and VoIP plans require you to sign a contract for 12 or 24 months (usually, this comes with a 'free' mobile phone or VoIP hardware). However, capped mobile plans are available with no contract (if you already have a handset) and most VoIP providers don't require you to enter a fixed-term contract.
- **Do you get a 'regular' phone number and can people call you cheaply?** When people call a household from a landline, they expect to pay landline call rates. Check whether it's possible for people to ring your household at landline rates.
- **Broadband alternatives** If you use ADSL, you'll have to replace it with cable broadband instead before disconnecting your landline (because ADSL requires a landline). This could be a disadvantage, as ADSL2 plans, where available, offer the best combination of price, speed and download limit of all broadband plans.
- **Why not try out internet phone calls on your computer before investing a lot of money?** A headset and free software will get you started.

- **Setup and hardware costs** To use VoIP, you can use a headset, a normal phone handset plugged into your computer via a special adapter (now available for under \$100), or a new dual-purpose phone that gives you a normal landline connection plus VoIP on the one handset. The quality of your handset or headset is important; better headsets cost from \$25 to \$50. Sometimes an internet phone, worth around \$100 to \$150, or a headset, is included with the VoIP service, subject to you signing up to a 12-month contract.
- **Call costs** Some of the plans offer very cheap calls: for example, international calls for under a cent a minute.
- **Free internet phone services** SKYPE is a VoIP service that lets you make free internet phone calls to other people using similar software or, alternatively, allows you to make calls to and receive calls from normal landlines for cheap per-minute rates. For more about SKYPE, see *Cheap chat* (CHOICE, August 2007).

Overall, the verdict is that it's probably not worth considering paid phone internet services unless you spend more than \$50 on calls each month, otherwise the cost of hardware probably means you're not making any savings.

### Alternative 2: Capped mobile plans

Consumers have told CHOICE how capped mobile phone plans cover all their monthly calls, reducing their need for a landline. For example, a \$49 monthly plan can cover around 150 short mobile calls before you hit the cap and start paying a higher rate for calls.

However, there are potential disadvantages if you rely solely on a mobile. For example, people who phone you might pay higher call costs than if they'd called a landline; and if the power's out your mobile is only as good as the length of charge it still has. ■

# On test

Home entertainment, whitegoods, household and personal appliances: they're all tested here.

## Inside

### 36 Dual-fuel ranges



### 40 66 cm TVs



### 42 Digital cameras



## Plus

### 46 Portable air conditioners

### 48 Vacuum cleaners

### 52 Treadmills

VACUUM CLEANER  
TEST PAGE 48

**CHOICE** has its own testing laboratories, where experienced technical staff put products through their paces. We use test methods from Australian Standards, as well as developing our own in order to match the way consumers use a product in real life. We buy most of the products we test, to maintain our independence from manufacturers and so that we know what you're faced with in the shops. Our recommendations are based on a product's quality and performance, with no hidden bias.

For more product tests go to [choice.com.au](http://choice.com.au)



# Cooking on a grand scale

## Monster ranges are in vogue, but are they worth the money?

### nutshell

► An extra-wide range might suit some serious cooks, but doesn't give as much flexibility in designing your kitchen as a separate cooktop and oven.

► The most expensive range tested performed the worst overall.

**T**hey could cost more than your first car and are about the same size, but if you entertain friends regularly, are cooking for a plus-sized family or simply want an extra-wide oven for the Christmas turkey, a dual-fuel range (a 90 cm wide electric oven with a gas cooktop) could be what you're after.

CHOICE tested six of them in the \$2100–\$5500 price range to see how well they cooked a variety of foods, and to answer the question that may save some sleepless nights — are they worth the money?

### What you get for your buck

The dual-fuel ranges in this test are designed as either freestanding units or to fit between your kitchen cabinets. They're stainless steel, with an electric grill and multi-function electric oven for versatility, plus a gas cooktop with five burners (including a wok burner) — gas gives instant, easily controlled heat. Some also have a fish burner in the centre of the cooktop for cooking a whole fish or for charring on a cast-iron grill plate placed on top. The ovens have at least four shelf positions and can fit wide baking and roasting dishes.

However, a dual-fuel range isn't for everyone. While they could suit a serious cook, they take up considerable space in your kitchen and their trays and racks are heavy

(particularly with a large roasting tray on top) and hard to clean in a normal-size domestic sink.

As with any oven, they all have to be professionally wired and plumbed in, adding to overall costs, and you'll need a 15 amp circuit installed if one isn't available.

### Range vs separates

If you're tossing up between a separate cooktop and oven or a range (combined unit), think about the following:

- A separate cooktop and oven give you maximum flexibility in your kitchen layout, with the option of a cooktop on the benchtop plus an under-bench or wall oven that doesn't have to be underneath the cooktop. You can choose a cooktop of any size or shape and the oven can be placed at any height to suit your preference, whereas a range's oven requires you to bend or squat to reach inside. However, your cupboards will probably need to be custom-built around the two separate components, which adds to the cost.
- A range's wide oven and extra burner could suit some serious cooks down to the ground. It might end up cheaper than separate components, especially if you're replacing an existing range rather than completely remodelling your kitchen. It may also have storage underneath for racks and pans. >

### HOW WE TESTED

- Our tester checked grill performance by toasting a full tray of bread (looking particularly for evenness), and grilling sausages to check evenness when cooking a high-fat food.
- To test the cooktop she made white sauce to measure how well the simmer burner maintains a low temperature; cooked rice to measure how well the large burner turns down to low from a high temperature and also how it maintains a set temperature; stir-fried beef with vegetables to assess the wok burner's ability to produce continuous high heat. She didn't penalise a cooktop for not having a fish/BBQ burner — it's an individual choice.
- The oven performance score was based on six cooking tests: scones to test evenness of cooking at high temperatures; sponge cakes to test the oven's ability to cook evenly on multiple shelves; meringues to test cooking at low temperatures over a long time; custard tart to test cooking a combination food and

its turn-down capacity; roast chicken to test roasting a non-uniform, whole food item; and roast turkey and vegetables plus a tray of biscuits to show the evenness of multiple-shelf cooking of a variety of foods, whether there is a transference of flavour and also to see how well it fits.

- To test ease of use of controls, our tester assessed how easy labelling, knobs, buttons and display panels are to use and comprehend. For the cooktop she assessed the layout of the burners and whether you're able to slide pots from burner to burner rather than lift them. To test ease of use of the grill, she checked whether it rolls out smoothly, supports a reasonable load, is stable and adjustable and that food on the tray doesn't touch the element. For the oven she looked at whether shelves roll out smoothly, don't tilt or pull right out, and whether it's easy to see the food inside.
- Our tester also assessed the instruction manuals.



## What to look for

### GAS COOKTOP

- Continuous grate design that allows pans to be moved around the burners without being lifted.
- The simmer burner at the front, so you don't have to lean over other burners to stir sauces and so on.
- One-piece burners for easy cleaning and maintenance.

### DOOR

- An oven door that's light and easy to open, and stays open in any position (without falling fully open or slamming shut).
- A large enough window for a clear view inside.

### GRILL

- A grill tray that comes out far enough to let you easily manipulate food at the back of the tray. Look for a safety stop mechanism to stop it pulling right out.
- A grill element that's set high into the ceiling or has a shield in front, so that it can't easily come into contact with your fingers.
- At least two grill tray heights.

### INSIDE

- Capacity — check the usable inside space by taking along your largest baking or roasting dish to the shop to see if it'll fit.
- An interior light — check that the bulb is easy to replace.
- A good range of shelf positions and three or more shelves. Shelves should have safety stops to prevent them being pulled out accidentally, and they shouldn't slope down when pulled out with a heavy dish on them.
- Moulded runners rather than metal pull-out ones, as they're easier to clean.
- Storage under the oven for large trays and racks.

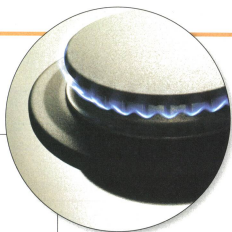
### LEGS

- Adjustable legs for levelling, and to match the height of your benchtop.

### OVEN AND GRILL FUNCTIONS

According to CHOICE's home economist, the most useful heating methods are:

- **Top and bottom elements ('conventional bake')** This is standard convection baking. It provides reasonably even heating, but tends to be slightly hotter towards the top, allowing food to brown on top. It's good for cooking foods such as cakes, roasts and casseroles.
- **Fan-forced (rear element)** Heat comes from an element at the back of the oven and is circulated by a fan surrounded by the element. The oven heats relatively quickly and efficiently, and heat is distributed evenly, which is helpful for multi-shelf cooking. It's similar to conventional bake but faster, with more even heat distribution.
- **Fan-assisted** The top and bottom elements of the oven are used, while a fan circulates heat. This can be useful for cooking on more than one shelf at once as it helps to distribute the hot air evenly.
- **Classic or base bake** This is where heat comes from the bottom element only. It's particularly recommended for getting crispy bases.
- **Top element only** Used for browning and finishing off dishes such as lasagne and cheese toppings.
- **Grill with fan** Can be used to cook chicken and other roasts or larger cuts of meat.



A 90 cm range's wide oven and extra burner could suit some serious cooks down to the ground.

WESTINGHOUSE/ISTOCKPHOTO

### CLEANING A RANGE

- Remove the inside metal runners and shelves and soak them in warm water with either dishwasher detergent or laundry detergent for best results.
- The best cleaning materials to use inside the range will depend on the type of stainless steel it's made from, so you'll need to experiment. Try: hot water and a microfibre cloth; vinegar or methylated spirits with a paper towel; any orange-based all-purpose kitchen cleaner with a microfibre cloth. It's best to clean small sections of the exterior at a time, to prevent streaking.

## Profiles



### BAUMATIC BAF9003

PRICE \$3769

#### GOOD POINTS

- The best scores for all the test components: oven, cooktop, grill and ease of use.
- Lots of different oven functions for cooking different types of food — see the table, below.
- Has a fish/barbecue burner.

#### BAD POINTS

- The internal light isn't bright enough to effectively see all food in the oven.
- The grill element has no shield to prevent hands from being accidentally burnt.
- The simmer burner is at the back, behind the wok burner.



### SMEG Professional Series SA9065XS

PRICE \$3290

#### GOOD POINTS

- Excellent oven result for meringues, roast chicken and turkey, vegetables and biscuits.
- Very good cooktop performance, and a very good burner layout.
- The manufacturer offers a course on using the range.

#### BAD POINTS

- Poor result for toast — uneven browning across the tray.
- No grill rack supplied.
- The grill element has no shield to protect hands from being accidentally burnt.
- Higher running costs due to inefficient heat retention.

While the Baumatic came top overall, aspects of some of the other tested models might suit you better. They're all profiled.



### BLANCO BFS95WFF

PRICE \$3249

#### GOOD POINTS

- Good cooktop performance, and a very good burner layout.
- Excellent results for grilled sausages, and very good oven performance.

#### BAD POINTS

- Disappointing test results for a stir-fry on the cooktop.
- The grill element has no shield to protect hands from being accidentally burned.

## USING THE TABLE

**Scores** The overall score is made up of:

Oven score: 20%

Grill score: 20%

Cooktop score: 20%

Ease of use score: 40%

**Functions and features** See *What to look for*, page 37.

**Running costs over 10 years** These are based on running the oven 175°C above room temperature for one hour, three times a week for 10 years at 15 cents per kWh and using the simmer, semi-rapid and wok burners for 30 mins every day at 1.6 cents per MJ/h for 10 years.

\* Listed in order of small, medium, large, wok, fish burner. (A) The instructions for cooking scones and sponge cake in these ovens say to use a narrow tray, not a full-oven-width one. CHOICE's test method uses a full-width tray because that's what people buy a larger oven for. Scores from both methods are in the table, but the overall score is calculated using the full-width tray results. The first score in this column shows the full-width results, the second those using a narrower tray.

| PRODUCT                          | PERFORMANCE       |                |                 |                   |                       | FUNCTIONS                        |                           |                                                 |                         |                      |                        |                     | FEATURES               | SPECIFICATIONS           |                      |                        |                                                                                    |
|----------------------------------|-------------------|----------------|-----------------|-------------------|-----------------------|----------------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------|------------------------|---------------------|------------------------|--------------------------|----------------------|------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Brand / model (in rank order)    | Overall score (%) | Oven score (%) | Grill score (%) | Cooktop score (%) | Ease of use score (%) | Top and bottom elements (no fan) | Rear element (fan-forced) | Top and bottom elements plus fan (fan-assisted) | Bottom element (no fan) | Top element (no fan) | Grill element (no fan) | Half grill (no fan) | Fish / barbecue burner | Flame failure protection | Self-cleaning liners | Usable oven volume (L) | External dimensions (cm, H x W x D; H = min/max hob height if legs are adjustable) |
| Baumatic BAF9003                 | 82                | 94             | 80              | 88                | 74                    | ✓                                | ✓                         | ✓                                               | ✓                       | ✓                    | ✓                      | ✓                   | ✓                      | ✓                        | ✓                    | 66                     | 92/93 x 90 x 60                                                                    |
| SmeG Professional Series SA9065X | 71                | 81             | 58              | 82                | 68                    | ✓                                | ✓                         | ✓                                               | ✓                       | ✓                    | ✓                      | ✓                   | ✓                      | ✓                        | ✓                    | 75                     | 87/94 x 90 x 60                                                                    |
| Blanco BFS95WFF                  | 70                | 72             | 78              | 73                | 64                    | ✓                                | ✓                         | ✓                                               | ✓                       | ✓                    | ✓                      | ✓                   | ✓                      | ✓                        | ✓                    | 47                     | 90 x 90 x 60                                                                       |
| Westinghouse DSK963S             | 70                | 73 / 82 (A)    | 63              | 80                | 66                    | ✓                                | ✓                         | ✓                                               | ✓                       | ✓                    | ✓                      | ✓                   | ✓                      | ✓                        | ✓                    | 76                     | 85/90 x 90 x 60                                                                    |
| Whirlpool ACG900IX               | 65                | 76 / 81 (A)    | 55              | 72                | 62                    | ✓                                | ✓                         | ✓                                               | ✓                       | ✓                    | ✓                      | ✓                   | ✓                      | ✓                        | ✓                    | 72                     | 85/92 x 90 x 60                                                                    |
| Ilve Titanium T90WMP             | 64                | 74             | 45              | 73                | 62                    | ✓                                | ✓                         | ✓                                               | ✓                       | ✓                    | ✓                      | ✓                   | ✓                      | ✓                        | ✓                    | 57                     | 91/96 x 90 x 60                                                                    |

**BEST  
BUY**



### WESTINGHOUSE DSK963S

PRICE \$2109

#### GOOD POINTS

- Good oven cooking results — excellent for roast chicken.
- Very good cooktop performance, and a very good burner layout.
- Excellent result for grilled sausages.

#### BAD POINTS

- Poor result for toast — uneven browning across the tray.
- The manufacturer recommends a maximum baking tray size of 36 cm long by 38 cm wide, rather than the full width of the oven — see the table for the effect of this on scores.
- No gas safety cut-off.
- Manual ignition (the others are automatic).
- The grill element has no shield to protect hands from being accidentally burnt.
- Higher running costs due to inefficient heat retention.



### WHIRLPOOL ACG900IX

PRICE \$2249

#### GOOD POINTS

- Good oven performance, with excellent results for sponge cake and roast chicken.
- Excellent result for grilled sausages.
- Very good burner layout.

#### BAD POINTS

- Very poor result for toast — very uneven browning across the tray.
- Like the Westinghouse, the manufacturer recommends a maximum baking tray size of 36 cm long by 38 cm wide.
- There's no stopper to prevent the shelves being pulled all the way out.
- The grill element has no shield to protect hands from being accidentally burnt.
- Higher running costs due to inefficient heat retention.



### ILVE Titanium T90WMP

PRICE \$5457

#### GOOD POINTS

- Good cooktop performance and a very good burner layout.
- Excellent result for cooking sponges and roast chicken.
- Has a 'self-cleaning' catalytic liner on all walls except the bottom of the oven.
- Has a fish/barbecue burner.
- The manufacturer offers courses on using the range.

#### BAD POINTS

- Poor result for toast — uneven browning across the tray.
- No grill rack is supplied, and the grill element has no shield to protect hands from being accidentally burnt.
- No clear indicator of the set temperature.

The ranges have an electric grill and a multi-function electric oven, plus a gas cooktop with five burners.

|                 |                                |                          | COSTS                         |            |
|-----------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------|------------|
| (cm, H x W x D) | Claimed burner ratings (MJ/h)* | Contact                  | Running costs (\$ / 10 years) | Price (\$) |
| x 68 x 41       | 4.0, 7.1, 11.8, 15.0, 13.0     | www.baumatic.com.au      | 1069                          | 3769       |
| x 77 x 45       | 4.0, 2 x 7.0, 12.0, 15.0       | www.omegasmeg.com.au     | 1353                          | 3290       |
| x 62 x 40       | 3.8, 2 x 6.6, 11.0, 15.0       | www.blanco-australia.com | 945                           | 3249       |
| x 78 x 41       | 4.0, 2 x 7.1, 11.0, 12.5       | www.westinghouse.com.au  | 1282                          | 2109       |
| x 78 x 41       | 4.1, 2 x 7.1, 11.0, 12.5       | www.whirlpool.com.au     | 1273                          | 2249       |
| x 64 x 44       | 4.0, 6.2, 9.5, 13.8, 9.5       | www.ilve.com.au          | 981                           | 5457       |



### FOR PEOPLE WITH A DISABILITY

An occupational therapist from the Independent Living Centre (NSW) checked out the tested models and told CHOICE that large ranges like these aren't suitable for anyone with any sort of weakness or cognitive impairment, for the following reasons:

- They can only be placed on the floor, which limits the access for wheelchair users and people with upper limb dysfunction and back pain.
- Wide shelves and roasting pans are heavy and awkward to lift and are also hard to clean in a domestic sink.
- People with cognitive impairment may find the amount of controls confusing.



# When small will do

## Our mini-test of 66 cm LCD TVs found two good models.

### nutshell

► All but the Palsonic lost points because they haven't got an inbuilt digital tuner.  
► Manufacturers change 66 cm TV models very fast; our market survey only found four that will still be available by the time you read this.

### HOW WE TESTED

- To check the picture and the colours, our testers set up the TVs close together and adjusted their controls to get the best picture quality possible. They kept the lighting in the room low and the sound muted, and four experts watched a variety of footage (from various movies and live TV) simultaneously on all the tested screens. They evaluated the picture quality and rated it out of 10.
- Testers checked how well each TV produces accurate colour, using a specially calibrated high-quality monitor as a reference.
- They displayed a number of test patterns from a high-quality DVD player, to measure if any picture was being cut off at the edges and/or any apparent distortions (such as circles that aren't round, or wavy lines that should be straight).
- They played movies and other footage to check the screen's ability to produce images without colour banding, jerkiness, blurring, vibration and colour bleeding in high-contrast or very intensely saturated parts of the image. They also checked that there were no trails behind fast-moving objects on the screen.
- They listened to both movies and music to check for rattles, hums, hisses or distortion, as well as making a judgment on how well the high and low sounds were produced.
- To see how easy the TVs are to operate, testers used the remote control, front panel controls and onscreen display to perform a number of common tasks. They looked for clear labelling, buttons and controls that are easily identified and can be used without interfering with other controls, and logical menus. Whether the TV had an inbuilt digital tuner was also included in the ease of use score.
- Finally they used a power meter to measure the power the TV uses on standby.

**T**hey're considered small by today's standards, but if you don't want to spend thousands or you're looking for a second, smaller TV for your bedroom or small living area, this test is for you. When these 66 cm widescreen LCD TVs produce a 4:3 image, it's similar in size to a 54 cm non-widescreen TV — which used to be considered fairly large, but now may not be big enough for some.

Why only four TVs in this test? You may find other brands in shops now, but models this size currently have such a high turnover rate that these are the only four we could buy for testing and guarantee still to be on the shelves by October.

### The results

The PALSONIC and TOSHIBA both have a good score for picture quality, and the TOSHIBA also has the best sound quality. However, we marked it down (in its ease of use score) because it doesn't have an inbuilt digital tuner. If a television has this feature it's a lot less hassle — you don't have to worry about added costs, an extra remote and more clutter in the lounge room to get digital TV.

The two top brands also rated well in CHOICE's latest reliability survey, with 97% of TOSHIBA and 95% of PALSONIC TVs not needing repair in the 12 months prior to the survey (which was published in full in the September 2007 issue). 95% of NECs also didn't need repair. We didn't get enough reports on AIKO models to report on the brand's reliability.

Looking for a slightly bigger TV? Keep your eyes peeled for our test of 81 cm televisions, coming soon. ■

| PRODUCT                       | PERFORMANCE       |                           |                         |                       |                          |
|-------------------------------|-------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------|
|                               | Overall score (%) | Picture quality score (%) | Sound quality score (%) | Ease of use score (%) | Standby energy score (%) |
| Brand / model (in rank order) |                   |                           |                         |                       |                          |
| Palsonic TFTV68HDT            | 72                | 73                        | 60                      | 73                    | 96                       |
| Toshiba Regza 26A3000A        | 69                | 73                        | 70                      | 49                    | 90                       |
| NEC NLT-26XT2                 | 60                | 63                        | 60                      | 43                    | 80                       |
| Aiko JTM-26A92                | 56                | 55                        | 60                      | 43                    | 80                       |

## What to buy

Go for the PALSONIC if you want a built-in digital TV tuner. If good sound is more important to you, the TOSHIBA is a better choice.



### PALSONIC TFTV68HDT

PRICE \$1499

#### GOOD POINTS

- Good picture quality.
- Inbuilt high-definition digital TV tuner.
- Easy-to-use onscreen user menus.
- 'Picture-in-picture' and 'side-by-side' picture options.
- Sound-widening effect.
- Digital audio output connection.

#### BAD POINTS

- The number keys on the remote control are small and closely spaced.
- No 'previous channel' button on the remote.



### TOSHIBA Regza 26A3000A

PRICE \$1399

#### GOOD POINTS

- Good picture and sound quality.
- Easy-to-use remote control and onscreen user menus.
- Sound-widening effect.
- Screen can be swivelled.
- Headphone socket.

#### BAD POINTS

- No inbuilt high-definition digital TV tuner.
- The base and screen aren't supplied assembled (which won't worry you if the screen is to be wall-mounted).
- No child lock.

## About the rest

- The NEC's picture has a slightly yellow-greenish tinge that can't be removed. We also found one faulty pixel on the sample we tested.
- The AIKO has a noticeably 'cold' picture, with a bluish tinge that seems to cause other colours to appear off-tone.
- The sound for both the NEC and AIKO is harsh, with some audible rattling at high volume.

## What to look for

### PICTURE

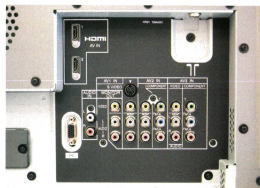
Try watching a variety of TV programs in the shop. In particular, look for natural skin tones on a person in a studio setting — a newsreader, for example.

Check how the picture looks if you step to the side or move up and down. Viewing angles have improved in the newer models, but some still have a dimmer picture when viewed from different angles — important if several people are watching TV at once.

And check the picture for a 'colour cast', such as a pinkish or greenish tinge (or a particularly cold bluish tinge, like the AIKO in this test), which can't be completely fixed by adjusting the controls.

### CONNECTIONS

Check the connections on the TV match the ones on any devices you want to hook up, such as a DVD recorder, cable TV, games console and so on. Also make sure there's easy access to these connections — it's handy if some are at the front as well as the back.



### FOR MORE INFO

For more points to consider when buying a TV, see CHOICE, April 2007, or go to [choiceextra.com.au](http://choiceextra.com.au) and click on that issue under 'Televisions, 81 cm' in the index.

| FEATURES      |                                              | SPECIFICATIONS |                             |                             |                                                        |            |  |
|---------------|----------------------------------------------|----------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|------------|--|
| Tilt / swivel | Toggle between current and previous channels | Tuner type     | Claimed resolution (pixels) | Dimensions (cm, H x W x D)* | Contact                                                | Price (\$) |  |
| S             | ✓                                            | A, HD          | 1366 x 768                  | 55 x 67.5 x 24              | <a href="http://palsonic.com.au">palsonic.com.au</a>   | 1499       |  |
|               |                                              | A              | 1366 x 768                  | 51.5 x 66.5 x 25            | <a href="http://toshibaav.com.au">toshibaav.com.au</a> | 1399       |  |
| T, S          | ✓                                            | A              | 1366 x 768                  | 58.5 x 70 x 23              | <a href="http://nec.com.au">nec.com.au</a>             | 999        |  |
|               | ✓                                            | A              | 1280 x 768                  | 53 x 68.5 x 25              | <a href="http://bigw.com.au">bigw.com.au</a>           | 698        |  |

### USING THE TABLE

**Scores** The overall score is made up of:

- Picture quality: 50%
- Sound quality: 20%
- Ease of use: 20%
- Energy consumption on standby: 10%

**Tuner type** A = analogue, HD = high-definition digital.

**Claimed resolution** All the screens support high-resolution images.

**Price** Recommended retail, as of August 2007.

### TABLE NOTES

\* Rounded up to the next half-centimetre, with the base attached and all protruding parts included, cord and connecting cables excluded, screen untitled and unswivelled if applicable.





# Travelling light

Pocket cameras can still give you great holiday snaps.

## nutshell

► You don't have to be weighed down with a large camera to take great shots. ► Decide which two or three main features you want before choosing a model. There's no point paying more for things you'll never use.

**C**HOICE tested 36 compact cameras weighing less than 300 grams and found some models you'd be happy to keep in your pocket or purse, ready to take out for that perfect shot.

A major issue to consider with most of these models is not just the size of the optical zoom lens, but how wide it zooms. A longer focal length allows you to close in on your subject, whereas a wide-angle zoom model is a good option if you want to include more of the surrounding scene in your composition.

If you like to take group shots of family and friends, using a camera with a lens that opens to 28 mm (instead of the standard 35 mm) could mean the difference between capturing everyone at a wedding in your photo and missing a few cousins at the edge of the shot. (The numbers refer to the focal length of the lens, not the width of the shot — a shorter lens gives a wider angle.) Also, photographing people in a confined space, such as a restaurant, is easier using a wide-angle lens.

## The top models

Of the four models in the *What to buy* list (far right) the PANASONIC DMC-LX2 and CANON Digital Ixus 850IS both have wide optical zoom lenses, but the PANASONIC delivers its widest angle (28 mm) in a 16:9 (widescreen) aspect ratio only. This results in a blank space above and below the image when you print the photo on normal-

sized photographic paper, but the image could look quite impressive on a widescreen TV. On the downside, both these models have a smaller optical zoom range than the CANON Powershot A710IS, which limits your photographic options when shooting objects in the distance, or when you want to take a portrait shot but can't move closer to the subject.

Although the CANON PowerShot A710IS can't zoom as wide as the PANASONIC or the CANON Digital Ixus 850IS, its 35–210 mm lens, plus good exposure and flash controls, make it a solid all-rounder. The PowerShot can also run on normal AA batteries, which can be very handy when you're caught out while travelling.

For creative types willing to learn a camera's manual controls, the CANON Powershot A710IS, Ixus 850IS and FUJIFILM Finepix F31fd should reward your effort with better-quality images. But if that sounds like too much hard work, the PANASONIC DMC-LX2 delivers the same high-quality results whether you take manual control of the camera or just point and shoot.

With 80% of the models in the table packing at least 7 megapixels (MP), resolution is no longer a major issue with compact cameras. Instead, you need to consider factors such as the camera's weight and dimensions, shutter delay and memory type, as well as our comprehensive performance scores, to help you decide which digital camera best suits your lifestyle. ■

## What to look for

For more on what to look for in a compact camera, see CHOICE, April 2007, or go to [choiceextra.com.au](http://choiceextra.com.au) and click on that issue under 'Digital cameras' in the index.

- If you're not using a good tripod, **optical image stabilisation** is preferable to electronic image stabilisation in helping to reduce the effects of vibration when you're trying to capture a sharp photo image.
- **Exposure controls** (see inset photo, right) Aperture (Av) controls the depth of field in your picture, allowing you to determine which parts of the image are in or out of focus. Having the option of setting the shutter speed (Tv) manually is handy if you're taking photos of fast-moving objects or need to compensate for low light.
- A **memory card** is simply the digital equivalent of film, with all these cameras storing photos as compressed JPEG files.



Above: Exposure controls — see left.

- All have a video out socket, for watching video and images on a TV.
- All have sound except for the OLYMPUS FE-210.

## What to buy

With 80% of the models in this test packing at least 7 MP, resolution is no longer a major issue when choosing a compact camera.



### CANON PowerShot A710IS

PRICE \$449

#### GOOD POINTS

- Very fast 'recovery time' between taking shots.
  - Comparatively good movie quality.
  - Large (6x) optical zoom range.
  - Significant improvement in image quality when using manual settings.
- BAD POINTS**
- Only average wide-angle setting.
  - Optical viewfinder not very accurate.



### PANASONIC DMC-LX2

PRICE \$799

#### GOOD POINTS

- Amongst the easiest to use.
  - Able to capture uncompressed (and so sharper) TIF images.
  - Allows wide-angle shooting.
- BAD POINTS**
- Poor movie quality.
  - Slow start-up.
  - Widest angle only available in 16:9 aspect ratio format.



### FUJIFILM Finepix F31fd

PRICE \$399

#### GOOD POINTS

- Accurate viewfinder.
  - Significant improvement in image quality when using manual settings.
- BAD POINTS**
- Limited (3x) optical zoom range.
  - No optical image stabilisation.



### CANON Digital Ixus 850IS

PRICE \$699

#### GOOD POINTS

- Accurate monitor.
  - Significant improvement in image quality when using manual settings.
- BAD POINTS**
- Optical viewfinder not very accurate.

## About the rest

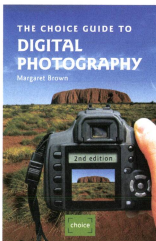
- The RICOH Caplio GX100 didn't make our *What to buy* list, due to its lower image quality. However, it offers a couple of unique features, including an optical zoom (3x) that opens as wide as 24 mm, and an impressively short start-up time and shutter delay. You can also attach an LCD viewfinder (an optional extra) to the accessory shoe when conditions get too bright to use the LCD monitor.
- The PANASONIC Lumix DMC-TZ3 incorporates a 10x optical zoom that ranges from 28 mm to a hefty 280 mm at the telephoto end. Unfortunately, it loses points thanks to its picture quality (it scored just 58%) and slow start-up time.
- The internal memory supplied with most digital cameras is next to useless and hardly worth mentioning — and then there's the SONY Cyber-Shot DSC-G1, with its whopping 2 GB of internal memory. Of the cameras in this test, this is the only one that doesn't warrant buying an extra memory card to go with it. It's also the most expensive compact camera in the test, however, so you don't get the memory free.
- The other models all have their good and bad points — check the table for scores and features.

## Did you know ?

You can fit over 260 images at a resolution of 7 megapixels on a 1 GB card. If you're running out of space and don't have a spare card, reduce the resolution to 5 megapixels in the camera settings. This should let you take a few extra shots and still be able to print A4-sized photos.

Switching off the LCD display and using the optical viewfinder to compose your shot can save power if your batteries are running low.

For photos that you want to last longer than a few weeks stuck to the fridge door, special colourfast photo papers are now available — they'll keep your photo memories looking good for up to 30 years or more.



Order your copy for \$26.95 from [choice.com.au/books](http://choice.com.au/books).

| PRODUCT                                        | PERFORMANCE       |                              |    |                                |    |                       |     |                       | FEATURES | SPECIFICATIONS                 |            |                        |            |                 |          |                         |  |                           |  |                                                      |  |                                   |  |                               |  |             |  |
|------------------------------------------------|-------------------|------------------------------|----|--------------------------------|----|-----------------------|-----|-----------------------|----------|--------------------------------|------------|------------------------|------------|-----------------|----------|-------------------------|--|---------------------------|--|------------------------------------------------------|--|-----------------------------------|--|-------------------------------|--|-------------|--|
| Brand / model<br>(in rank order within groups) | Overall score (%) | Auto image quality score (%) |    | Manual image quality score (%) |    | Ease of use score (%) |     | Versatility score (%) |          | Viewfinder / monitor score (%) |            | Battery life score (%) |            | Flash score (%) |          | Movie quality score (%) |  | Manual aperture / shutter |  | Image stabilisation system:<br>optical or electronic |  | Effective resolution (megapixels) |  | Zoom range (35 mm equivalent) |  | Memory type |  |
| Canon Powershot A710IS                         | 70                | 62                           | 67 | 67                             | 81 | 52                    | 100 | 75                    | 69       | ✓ / ✓                          | Optical    | 7.0                    | 35-210     |                 | SD       |                         |  |                           |  |                                                      |  |                                   |  |                               |  |             |  |
| Fujifilm Finepix F31fd                         | 69                | 66                           | 70 | 64                             | 50 | 80                    | 100 | 64                    | 63       | ✓ / ✓                          | Electronic | 6.0                    | 36-108     |                 | xD       |                         |  |                           |  |                                                      |  |                                   |  |                               |  |             |  |
| Panasonic DMC-LX2                              | 69                | 67                           | 67 | 71                             | 64 | 68                    | 93  | 57                    | 39       | ✓ / ✓                          | Optical    | 10.0                   | 28-112     |                 | SD       |                         |  |                           |  |                                                      |  |                                   |  |                               |  |             |  |
| Canon Digital Ixus 850 IS                      | 68                | 61                           | 66 | 71                             | 67 | 51                    | 100 | 66                    | 61       | - / -                          | Optical    | 7.1                    | 28-105     |                 | SD       |                         |  |                           |  |                                                      |  |                                   |  |                               |  |             |  |
| Canon Digital Ixus 900 Ti                      | 67                | 60                           | 65 | 66                             | 64 | 52                    | 100 | 73                    | 56       | - / -                          |            | 10.0                   | 37-111     |                 | SD       |                         |  |                           |  |                                                      |  |                                   |  |                               |  |             |  |
| Canon Powershot A570IS                         | 67                | 58                           | 69 | 65                             | 77 | 53                    | 100 | 52                    | 57       | ✓ / ✓                          | Optical    | 7.1                    | 35-140     |                 | SD/MM    |                         |  |                           |  |                                                      |  |                                   |  |                               |  |             |  |
| Nikon Coolpix L6                               | 67                | 68                           | 70 | 59                             | 58 | 58                    | 100 | 68                    | 61       | - / -                          |            | 6.0                    | 38-116     |                 | SD       |                         |  |                           |  |                                                      |  |                                   |  |                               |  |             |  |
| Nikon Coolpix P5000                            | 67                | 71                           | 75 | 53                             | 72 | 52                    | 100 | 72                    | 41       | ✓ / ✓                          | Optical    | 10.0                   | 36-126     |                 | SD       |                         |  |                           |  |                                                      |  |                                   |  |                               |  |             |  |
| Nikon Coolpix S10                              | 67                | 65                           | 69 | 63                             | 66 | 51                    | 100 | 74                    | 50       | - / -                          | Optical    | 5.9                    | 38-380     |                 | SD       |                         |  |                           |  |                                                      |  |                                   |  |                               |  |             |  |
| Ricoh Caplio GX100                             | 67                | 57                           | 58 | 74                             | 68 | 63                    | 100 | 56                    | 40       | ✓ / ✓                          | Optical    | 10.0                   | 24-72      |                 | SD       |                         |  |                           |  |                                                      |  |                                   |  |                               |  |             |  |
| Sony Cyber-shot DSC-G1                         | 67                | 58                           | 61 | 68                             | 52 | 67                    | 98  | 72                    | 61       | - / -                          | Optical    | 5.9                    | 38-114     |                 | MS Duo   |                         |  |                           |  |                                                      |  |                                   |  |                               |  |             |  |
| Panasonic DMC-FX07                             | 66                | 58                           | 61 | 69                             | 55 | 67                    | 100 | 55                    | 55       | - / -                          | Optical    | 7.1                    | 28-102     |                 | SD       |                         |  |                           |  |                                                      |  |                                   |  |                               |  |             |  |
| Sony Cyber-shot DSC-N2                         | 66                | 65                           | 64 | 65                             | 57 | 58                    | 92  | 77                    | 36       | - / ✓                          |            | 10.0                   | 38-114     |                 | MS Duo   |                         |  |                           |  |                                                      |  |                                   |  |                               |  |             |  |
| Canon Powershot A550                           | 65                | 57                           | 63 | 65                             | 60 | 56                    | 100 | 58                    | 63       | - / -                          |            | 7.0                    | 35-140     |                 | SD/MM    |                         |  |                           |  |                                                      |  |                                   |  |                               |  |             |  |
| Fujifilm Finepix F40fd                         | 65                | 63                           | 69 | 58                             | 54 | 62                    | 100 | 69                    | 52       | - / -                          | Electronic | 8.3                    | 36-108     |                 | SD or xD |                         |  |                           |  |                                                      |  |                                   |  |                               |  |             |  |
| Sony Cyber-shot DSC-T100                       | 65                | 60                           | 64 | 70                             | 47 | 61                    | 93  | 66                    | 39       | - / -                          | Optical    | 8.0                    | 35-175     |                 | MS Duo   |                         |  |                           |  |                                                      |  |                                   |  |                               |  |             |  |
| Sony Cyber-shot DSC-W80                        | 65                | 62                           | 65 | 74                             | 54 | 49                    | 100 | 55                    | 34       | - / -                          | Optical    | 7.1                    | 35-105     |                 | MS Duo   |                         |  |                           |  |                                                      |  |                                   |  |                               |  |             |  |
| Canon Digital Ixus i7 zoom                     | 64                | 58                           | 64 | 68                             | 46 | 68                    | 100 | 37                    | 70       | - / -                          |            | 7.0                    | 38-90      |                 | SD/MM    |                         |  |                           |  |                                                      |  |                                   |  |                               |  |             |  |
| Casio Exilim EX-Z1050                          | 64                | 65                           | 71 | 59                             | 57 | 55                    | 99  | 55                    | 43       | - / -                          | Electronic | 10.0                   | 38-114     |                 | SD       |                         |  |                           |  |                                                      |  |                                   |  |                               |  |             |  |
| Sony Cyber-shot DSC-W55                        | 64                | 65                           | 64 | 67                             | 53 | 49                    | 98  | 57                    | 34       | - / -                          |            | 7.1                    | 38-114     |                 | MS Duo   |                         |  |                           |  |                                                      |  |                                   |  |                               |  |             |  |
| Nikon Coolpix S500                             | 63                | 65                           | 70 | 52                             | 56 | 58                    | 100 | 67                    | 39       | - / -                          | Optical    | 7.1                    | 35-105     |                 | SD       |                         |  |                           |  |                                                      |  |                                   |  |                               |  |             |  |
| Olympus FE-240                                 | 63                | 71                           | 71 | 49                             | 32 | 61                    | 100 | 79                    | 61       | - / -                          | Electronic | 7.0                    | 38-190     |                 | xD       |                         |  |                           |  |                                                      |  |                                   |  |                               |  |             |  |
| Pentax Optio W20                               | 63                | 62                           | 66 | 53                             | 64 | 52                    | 100 | 71                    | 44       | - / -                          | Electronic | 7.1                    | 38-114     |                 | SD       |                         |  |                           |  |                                                      |  |                                   |  |                               |  |             |  |
| Samsung NV7 OPS                                | 63                | 63                           | 67 | 57                             | 49 | 59                    | 99  | 61                    | 41       | ✓ / ✓                          | Optical    | 7.1                    | 38-270     |                 | SD       |                         |  |                           |  |                                                      |  |                                   |  |                               |  |             |  |
| Casio Exilim EX-V7                             | 62                | 56                           | 58 | 65                             | 60 | 61                    | 79  | 54                    | 49       | - / ✓                          | Electronic | 7.1                    | 38-266     |                 | SD       |                         |  |                           |  |                                                      |  |                                   |  |                               |  |             |  |
| Panasonic Lumix DMC-LZ7                        | 62                | 61                           | 66 | 60                             | 59 | 53                    | 67  | 70                    | 61       | - / -                          | Optical    | 7.2                    | 37-222     |                 | SD       |                         |  |                           |  |                                                      |  |                                   |  |                               |  |             |  |
| Panasonic Lumix DMC-TZ3                        | 62                | 58                           | 58 | 64                             | 59 | 71                    | 67  | 63                    | 58       | - / -                          | Optical    | 7.1                    | 28-280     |                 | SD       |                         |  |                           |  |                                                      |  |                                   |  |                               |  |             |  |
| Nikon Coolpix L5                               | 61                | 56                           | 61 | 55                             | 55 | 53                    | 100 | 70                    | 51       | - / -                          | Optical    | 7.1                    | 38-190     |                 | SD       |                         |  |                           |  |                                                      |  |                                   |  |                               |  |             |  |
| Samsung NV10                                   | 61                | 68                           | 69 | 48                             | 45 | 59                    | 100 | 64                    | 38       | - / ✓                          | Electronic | 10.0                   | 35-105     |                 | SD       |                         |  |                           |  |                                                      |  |                                   |  |                               |  |             |  |
| Nikon Coolpix S9                               | 58                | 58                           | 64 | 59                             | 56 | 63                    | 46  | 59                    | 33       | - / -                          |            | 6.0                    | 38-114     |                 | SD       |                         |  |                           |  |                                                      |  |                                   |  |                               |  |             |  |
| Pentax Optio T30                               | 56                | 68                           | 70 | 31                             | 62 | 48                    | 87  | 53                    | 43       | - / -                          | Electronic | 7.1                    | 37.5-112.5 |                 | SD       |                         |  |                           |  |                                                      |  |                                   |  |                               |  |             |  |
| Kodak Easyshare C653                           | 55                | 59                           | 53 | 37                             | 49 | 50                    | 100 | 67                    | 46       | - / -                          | Electronic | 6.0                    | 36-108     |                 | SD       |                         |  |                           |  |                                                      |  |                                   |  |                               |  |             |  |
| Olympus FE-210                                 | 55                | 58                           | 62 | 40                             | 27 | 59                    | 100 | 68                    | 39       | - / -                          | Electronic | 7.0                    | 38-114     |                 | xD       |                         |  |                           |  |                                                      |  |                                   |  |                               |  |             |  |
| Pentax Optio A30                               | 55                | 61                           | 63 | 37                             | 69 | 60                    | 63  | 54                    | 35       | - / ✓                          | Optical    | 10.0                   | 38-114     |                 | SD       |                         |  |                           |  |                                                      |  |                                   |  |                               |  |             |  |
| Ricoh Caplio R5                                | 55                | 62                           | 56 | 27                             | 59 | 58                    | 100 | 66                    | 43       | - / -                          | Optical    | 7.1                    | 28-200     |                 | SD       |                         |  |                           |  |                                                      |  |                                   |  |                               |  |             |  |
| Kodak Easyshare C875                           | 53                | 53                           | 49 | 34                             | 56 | 55                    | 95  | 69                    | 41       | ✓ / ✓                          |            | 8.0                    | 37-185     |                 | SD       |                         |  |                           |  |                                                      |  |                                   |  |                               |  |             |  |

## USING THE TABLE

**Scores** The overall score is made up of:

- Image quality (auto and manual are equal): 30%
- Ease of use: 25%
- Versatility: 12%
- Viewfinder/monitor: 12%
- Battery life: 10%
- Flash: 8%
- Movie quality: 3%

**Features** See *What to look for*, page 42, for more on these features.

**Effective resolution** This calculation is based on the number of pixels in the largest image the camera can produce.

**Zoom range** A 35 mm equivalent figure indicates a range comparable to a 35 mm film-based camera.

### Memory type

- xD: xD Card.
- MS: Memory Stick.
- MS Duo: small-format version of Memory Stick.
- SD: Secure Digital card.
- MM: Multimedia card.

**Batteries** Li-Ion batteries are rechargeable. None of the cameras in the table that takes Li-Ion batteries can also use normal alkalines, except the RICOH GX100. Those that say 'AA' can use alkaline, lithium or rechargeable 'AA' batteries.

**Viewfinder** An optical viewfinder provides an alternative to the LCD monitor when taking a shot in bright conditions.

**Shutter delay** The time it takes from the moment the shutter button is pressed to the moment the picture is taken.

**Start-up time** The time delay between turning on the camera and being ready to take a photo.

**Price** Recommended retail, as of July 2007.

### TABLE NOTE

(A) Can also use two AAA batteries.

|            | Optical viewfinder | Monitor size (mm, W x H) | Shutter delay (sec) | Start-up time (sec) | Size (cm, W x H x D) | Weight (g) | Price (\$) |
|------------|--------------------|--------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|----------------------|------------|------------|
| AA         | ✓                  | 50 x 38                  | 0.55                | 2.0                 | 10 x 7 x 4           | 280        | 449        |
| Li-Ion     |                    | 50 x 38                  | 0.55                | 2.0                 | 9.5 x 6 x 3          | 210        | 399        |
| Li-Ion     |                    | 60 x 34                  | 0.57                | 3.0                 | 11 x 6 x 5           | 240        | 799        |
| Li-Ion     | ✓                  | 50 x 38                  | 0.26                | 1.5                 | 9 x 6 x 3            | 175        | 699        |
| Li-Ion     | ✓                  | 50 x 38                  | 0.52                | 1.5                 | 9.5 x 6 x 3          | 188        | 699        |
| AA         | ✓                  | 50 x 37                  | 0.50                | 2.5                 | 9 x 7 x 4.5          | 300        | 449        |
| Li-Ion     |                    | 50 x 38                  | 0.65                | 3.0                 | 9.5 x 6 x 3          | 180        | 229        |
| Li-Ion     | ✓                  | 50 x 38                  | 1.00                | 3.0                 | 10.5 x 7.5 x 4.5     | 250        | 649        |
| Li-Ion     |                    | 50 x 38                  | 0.40                | 3.0                 | 12 x 7.5 x 4         | 260        | 499        |
| Li-Ion (A) | Optional           | 49 x 37                  | 0.01                | 1.5                 | 11.5 x 6.5 x 4.5     | 260        | 799        |
| Li-Ion     |                    | 71 x 54                  | 0.22                | 4.5                 | 9.5 x 7.5 x 3        | 250        | 999        |
| Li-Ion     |                    | 50 x 38                  | 0.57                | 2.0                 | 9.5 x 5.5 x 2.5      | 160        | 549        |
| Li-Ion     |                    | 59 x 44                  | 0.53                | 2.5                 | 10 x 6.5 x 2.5       | 181        | 749        |
| AA         | ✓                  | 39 x 30                  | 0.47                | 1.5                 | 9.5 x 7 x 4.5        | 235        | 279        |
| Li-Ion     |                    | 50 x 38                  | 0.72                | 2.5                 | 10 x 6.5 x 3         | 182        | 449        |
| Li-Ion     |                    | 60 x 45                  | 0.21                | 2.5                 | 9.5 x 6 x 2.5        | 171        | 749        |
| Li-Ion     | ✓                  | 50 x 37                  | 0.11                | 2.0                 | 9.5 x 6 x 2.5        | 150        | 449        |
| Li-Ion     |                    | 37 x 27                  | 0.34                | 2.0                 | 9.6 x 4.5 x 2.5      | 123        | 449        |
| Li-Ion     |                    | 53 x 36                  | 0.71                | 2.0                 | 10 x 6 x 2.5         | 151        | 499        |
| Li-Ion     | ✓                  | 50 x 37                  | 0.32                | 2.5                 | 9 x 6 x 2.5          | 145        | 399        |
| Li-Ion     |                    | 50 x 37                  | 0.89                | 3.5                 | 9 x 5.5 x 2.5        | 136        | 449        |
| Li-Ion     |                    | 50 x 38                  | 0.55                | 2.5                 | 9.5 x 6 x 2.5        | 134        | 399        |
| Li-Ion     |                    | 50 x 37                  | 0.79                | 4.5                 | 11.5 x 5.5 x 3.5     | 151        | 399        |
| Li-Ion     |                    | 50 x 38                  | 0.45                | 4.0                 | 11 x 6.5 x 6.5       | 290        | 649        |
| Li-Ion     |                    | 50 x 37                  | 0.63                | 1.5                 | 9.5 x 6.5 x 2.5      | 178        | 649        |
| AA         |                    | 49 x 37                  | 0.54                | 3.5                 | 10 x 6.5 x 4.5       | 250        | 329        |
| Li-Ion     |                    | 60 x 45                  | 0.58                | 3.0                 | 11 x 6.5 x 4         | 270        | 769        |
| AA         |                    | 50 x 37                  | 0.87                | 5.0                 | 10 x 6.5 x 5         | 245        | 349        |
| Li-Ion     |                    | 50 x 38                  | 1.06                | 4.0                 | 9.5 x 6.5 x 3        | 165        | 599        |
| Li-Ion     |                    | 50 x 38                  | 0.53                | 3.5                 | 9.5 x 6 x 2          | 132        | 349        |
| Li-Ion     |                    | 59 x 45                  | 1.51                | 5.0                 | 10 x 6 x 2           | 133        | 379        |
| AA         | ✓                  | 48 x 36                  | 1.38                | 2.5                 | 9 x 7 x 3.5          | 220        | 199        |
| AA         |                    | 50 x 38                  | 1.33                | 4.5                 | 9 x 7 x 3.5          | 181        | 199        |
| Li-Ion     |                    | 50 x 38                  | 1.40                | 2.5                 | 9.5 x 6 x 2.5        | 147        | 479        |
| Li-Ion     |                    | 50 x 37                  | 2.05                | 4.0                 | 9.5 x 6 x 3          | 165        | 449        |
| AA         |                    | 50 x 39                  | 1.46                | 3.5                 | 9.5 x 7 x 4          | 250        | 299        |

## HOW WE TESTED

- To compare the camera's images at their optimal quality, our testers captured photos indoors and outdoors, in both manual and automatic modes. They also checked the accuracy of colour reproduction, and measured picture 'noise' and resolution (sharpness) as well as each camera's focusing speed and accuracy.
- A panel of five people assessed how easy the tested cameras are to use, checking each camera's manual, viewfinder and monitor.
- To find out how versatile each camera is, our testers looked at aspects such as memory, light sensitivity adjustment (ISO), white balance, shutter speed, exposure options, and viewfinder/monitor size and adjustment.
- Battery life was measured by the number of photos you can take with freshly charged or new batteries, when every second image taken uses the flash. Any camera that can take 250 photos on a fully charged set of batteries scored 100%.
- For each camera that can record video, four 'highest-quality' movies were made, and our testers then scored them for resolution of detail, fluency of playback, picture noise and pixelation caused by compression.



# Not so cool

If you can, consider other types of cooling before you resort to a portable air conditioner.

## nutshell

► Portable air conditioners are expensive, noisy, generate water that needs to be drained regularly, and they aren't as effective as built-in models — so consider other cooling options first.

► If you're renting or want to be able to move an air conditioner from room to room, though, you might still want to buy one. CHOICE found three models that are better than the rest.

**P**ortable air conditioners are generally ugly, noisy, high-maintenance and less effective than their built-in counterparts. If you're renting and so don't want to fork out for a fixed air conditioner, or you're looking for one that can be wheeled from room to room, they may tick your box. Otherwise consider all other cooling options first.

## How they work

Portable air conditioners work the same way as built-in ones. They suck in warm and humid air, cool and dehumidify it, and blow it back out. Some can also be switched to a reverse cycle and used as a heater in winter.

Built-in models have an external unit that disposes of the hot air and condensed water they generate. Portable air conditioners require you to install an air duct through an open window with a 'window kit' that's provided. This kit also helps seal the gap around the duct to stop the cooled air escaping. The HOTPOINT, OMEGA and ELECTROLUX EPF also have ducting for permanent wall installation, but then you won't be able to move them.

With a portable model you have to empty the condensed water it generates, which is collected inside. If you run the machine non-stop this could be necessary every two hours, or it will automatically shut down. All the drainage plugs are difficult to reach because they're at the bottom rear of the units; some also require a tool to lever them out. The two ELECTROLUX models let you attach a separate hose to drain the condensed water into

a bigger external container, which still has to be emptied.

On the positive side, these air conditioners plug into a normal power point and can be moved between rooms — provided there's an accessible window for the duct. However, they're all quite large and heavy. Check the length of the duct to ensure it'll reach the window of the room you want to use the air conditioner in. If the power cord is too short you can use an extension cord.

Most of these models claim to effectively cool an 18–20 sq m area, which is equivalent to a larger bedroom or a medium-sized living area. If you have a large open-plan living area and kitchen, one of these machines won't have much impact. But in an appropriately sized area, one of these portables will make your room cooler.

## Do you really need one?

Before you buy anything, heatproof your home as much as possible. Even if you rent, simple measures like sealing up the gaps around windows and doors and installing blinds or curtains will help. If you own your home, you can install external window shading or double-glaze your windows without major cost. Roof insulation makes a big difference.

If you live in a dry climate, an evaporative cooler is a good cooling option, and is more energy-efficient than an air conditioner. In a humid climate, built-in air conditioning will cool and dehumidify a room more effectively and efficiently than a portable model with the same kilowatt capacity. ■

## HOW WE TESTED

**Cooling performance** CHOICE tested in a 4.5 m by 4.5 m room with a 2.4 m ceiling. This was surrounded by a room or 'shell', which was kept at a constant temperature and humidity. When the interior room was at a stable 27°C and 70% relative humidity, the air conditioners were turned on full for an hour. The test was repeated at 32°C and 70% humidity.

Their cooling effectiveness was rated on their ability to reduce the temperature from 27°C to 23°C and from 32°C to 26°C, as well as lowering the humidity from 70% to 60% in both cases.

**Ease of use** The testers looked at: stability; mobility on floors and carpet; installing the window kit; removing and refitting the air filter; water drainage; controls; instruction manuals.

| PRODUCT                       | PERFORMANCE       |                   |                       |                               |
|-------------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------------|
|                               | Overall score (%) | Cooling score (%) | Ease of use score (%) | Claimed cooling capacity (kW) |
| Brand / model (in rank order) |                   |                   |                       |                               |
| Nationwide Electrical NE14C   | 66                | 70                | 58                    | 4.1                           |
| Omega OPA14SA (A)             | 61                | 56                | 73                    | 4.1                           |
| Electrolux EPV12CRA           | 60                | 52                | 80                    | 2.7                           |
| Electrolux EPF12CRN2A (B)     | 57                | 49                | 75                    | 2.9                           |
| Hotpoint MAC-130 (B)          | 56                | 48                | 73                    | 3.8                           |
| Dimplex DAC12004RC-2          | 54                | 49                | 67                    | 3.5                           |
| Clausen PVMB12KEH-410         | 53                | 51                | 57                    | 3.2                           |



# What to buy



**NATIONWIDE ELECTRICAL NE14C**

PRICE \$899  
GOOD POINTS

- The best cooling performance.
- BAD POINTS**
- Not very easy to use.
- Water drainage plug is difficult to remove.
- No remote control.
- Comparatively short power cord (1.5 m) and duct (1.4 m).
- Poor instructions.

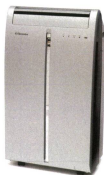


**OMEGA OPA14SA**

PRICE \$1099  
GOOD POINTS

- Easy to use, with a simple control panel.
- Has a heating element so it can be used as a heater in cooler months.
- Remote control.
- Equal longest power cord (2.7 m) and duct (1.9 m).
- BAD POINTS**
- Poorer cooling performance than the NATIONWIDE ELECTRICAL.
- Water drainage plug is easy to remove but difficult to replace.

The Omega and the Electrolux aren't as good at cooling, but they're much easier to use than the Nationwide Electrical.



**ELECTROLUX EPV12CRA**

PRICE \$1059  
GOOD POINTS

- The easiest to use of the models tested.
- The easiest water drainage: a hose can drain water into a larger container.
- The quietest model in the test.
- Remote control (no onboard controls).
- Oscillating louvres.
- Detailed, easy-to-follow instructions.
- BAD POINTS**
- Poorer cooling performance than the NATIONWIDE ELECTRICAL.
- Comparatively short power cord (1.4 m) and duct (1.4 m).

## USING THE TABLE

**Scores** Overall score: drainage (70%), ease of use (30%).

**Claimed cooling capacity** Inbuilt air conditioners are more energy-efficient than portable models; the claimed cooling capacity isn't comparable between the two types. CHOICE would like to see portable air conditioners included in the energy rating scheme, so you could meaningfully compare models.

**Measured power consumption** The result in the table is the average of both cooling tests (see *How we tested*, far left).

**Drainage tank volume** The unit switches off once the tank is full, so that it doesn't overflow.

**Noise** The noise results are comparative only — what you actually hear will depend on the environment you're in.

**Oscillating louvres** enable the cool air to be directed more widely, rather than just straight ahead.

**Price** Recommended retail, as of August 2007.

## TABLE NOTES

ns Not stated.

(A) Exclusive to Harvey Norman; limited stock available.

(B) Discontinued, but may still be available in some shops.

(C) Not reverse-cycle, but has an electric heating element.

|                  | FEATURES                |                |                     | SPECIFICATIONS |                          |             |                            |                          |                    |                                 |            |
|------------------|-------------------------|----------------|---------------------|----------------|--------------------------|-------------|----------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------|---------------------------------|------------|
| consumption (kW) | Comparative noise level | Remote control | Oscillating louvers | Reverse-cycle  | Drainage tank volume (L) | Weight (kg) | Dimensions (cm, H x W x D) | Length of power cord (m) | Length of duct (m) | Contact                         | Price (\$) |
|                  | Medium                  |                |                     |                | 3                        | 34          | 84 x 41 x 44               | 1.5                      | 1.4                | www.nationwideelectrical.com.au | 899        |
|                  | Medium                  | ✓              |                     | (C)            | ns                       | 36          | 85 x 48 x 39               | 2.7                      | 1.9                | www.omega-australia.com         | 1099       |
|                  | Quieter                 | ✓              | ✓                   |                | 2                        | 38          | 83 x 47 x 40               | 1.4                      | 1.4                | www.electrolux.com.au           | 1059       |
|                  | Medium                  | ✓              |                     |                | 0.8                      | 35          | 85 x 48 x 39               | 2.7                      | 1.9                | www.electrolux.com.au           | 949        |
|                  | Medium                  | ✓              |                     |                | 5.5                      | 35          | 85 x 48 x 39               | 2.7                      | 1.9                | www.hotpoint.com.au             | 899        |
|                  | Medium                  |                | ✓                   |                | 2                        | 32          | 76 x 40 x 38               | 2.3                      | 1.5                | www.dimplex-australia.com       | 900        |
|                  | Noisier                 | ✓              | ✓                   | (C)            | 2.25                     | 35          | 82 x 30 x 43               | 2.1                      | 1.5                | www.minervainternational.com.au | 999        |

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

See these stories in CHOICE, or go to [choiceextra.com.au](http://choiceextra.com.au) and click on the articles under 'air conditioners' in the index:

- Small built-in air conditioners (June 2007).
- Large built-in air conditioners (October 2006).
- Ceiling fans (September 2007).

Also check out on [choiceextra](http://choiceextra.com.au):

- Cooling capacity calculator: work out how much cooling your room needs.



# Hard-floor heroes

If you don't have carpet, these cheap vacuum cleaners are all you need

## nutshell

► These cheaper vacuum cleaners are fine for hard floors, but for carpets some of the more expensive models CHOICE previously tested are a little better.

► If you have asthma or a sensitivity to dust, a HEPA filter in your vacuum cleaner might help.

**Y**ou don't need to spend hundreds of dollars on a vacuum cleaner if you've mainly got timber or other hard floors, and perhaps just a few rugs or small carpets. CHOICE tested 13 vacuum cleaners costing around \$70 to \$200, and while on carpet they don't quite have the dirt-sucking power of their more expensive cousins from previous tests, on hard floors most perform just as well. Overall, their performance means the best of them represent good value for money.

The VOLTA Pulsar Power Plus Parketto was the top scorer, with 79% overall — just 3% lower than the BOSCH Ergomaxx HEPA, the top scorer in our test of vacuum cleaners costing between \$500 and \$1000. (For that, see CHOICE, June 2007, or go to [choiceextra.com.au](http://choiceextra.com.au) and click on that issue under 'Vacuum cleaners').

## Do you get what you pay for?

While the VOLTA retails for \$150, the BOSCH is a hefty \$699. So what exactly are you paying an extra \$500-odd for? The two models performed equally well on hard floors, scored similarly for cleaning around corners and edges and are both easy to use. But the BOSCH's superiority shone through when it came removing dirt from carpet; it got a score of 68% compared to the VOLTA's 59%.

In the end, it comes down to how much you're willing to pay to get an extra 10% or so of dirt out of your carpet. If you've invested thousands of dollars in carpeting your home, you might decide on a more expensive vacuum cleaner. But if you're renting or you've got mainly hard floors, these cheaper models are a good option.

## What to look for

### VARIABLE SUCTION/POWER

All but three of the tested models allow you to lower the suction for more delicate jobs, such as cleaning curtains.

### TRY WHEN YOU BUY

It's best to try out a vacuum cleaner in the shop to see how easy it is to manoeuvre over carpet and hard surfaces. Most of the models we tested in this price range are lightweight and have a compact design for easy storage. However, if you've got sensitive ears, beware: some have an irritating, high-pitched sound. A long cord is a bonus, but you're more likely to find these on more expensive models.

### DUST COLLECTOR

All the cleaners have a 'bag full' indicator, unless the contents of their bin are visible. Cloth dirt collectors are messier and harder to empty, while paper bags are more user-friendly but have ongoing costs and may be something you occasionally forget to buy.



### HEPA FILTER

This stands for high-efficiency particulate air filter — an international standard for filters that trap minute particles — which can help if you have asthma or a dust allergy or sensitivity. However, on some machines you have to replace the filter regularly (about once a year) to ensure it works efficiently.

### TELESCOPIC WAND

This lets you adjust the wand to suit your height, so you don't have to bend too much. All but two models (the SHOP VAC Compact and the upright HOOVER Breeze Bagless) have this function, but taller people may still find even some of the extendable wands on the short side — so it pays to test them out in the shop first.

## Timber floor tips

To keep your timber floors looking good:

- **Avoid direct sunlight** Draw curtains or close blinds; new floors, in particular, can be vulnerable to fading in direct sunlight. Heat generated by too much exposure to sunlight can also cause localised changes in moisture content, causing warping.
- **Keep your floors dry** Vacuuming or sweeping is best. Preferably don't use detergent, and use water sparingly. For stubborn spots of dirt, use a mixture of one cup of methylated spirits in a bucket of water. Wipe up spills quickly to prevent moisture from getting beneath the boards, where it can lead to swelling or mould problems.
- **Put door mats** at entry points, or even make your home a shoe-free zone. This will reduce scratches and scrapes and lengthen the period before you have to resand and seal or polish.
- **Use protective pads** to stop furniture scratching the floor.

While timber is generally regarded as a good environmental building material choice, the logging of native old-growth forest remains a subject of heated debate. If you're concerned, buy flooring products reliably certified to be of plantation origin, or use recycled timber products. ■

## What to buy \$

|                                               |       |
|-----------------------------------------------|-------|
| <b>VOLTA</b> Pulsar Power Plus Parketto U4505 | \$150 |
| <b>LG</b> V-CD504STU                          | \$199 |
| <b>NILFISK</b> Coupe Parquet                  | \$179 |
| <b>VAX</b> Vivacity V-071                     | \$169 |
| <b>GENIUS</b> 2400 Bagless MC801-E            | \$149 |
| <b>KAMBROOK</b> Jaguar KVC30                  | \$100 |

BEST  
BUY

## FOR PEOPLE WITH A DISABILITY

Based on guidelines provided by the Independent Living Centre (NSW), none of the vacuum cleaners tested would be ideal for use by people with a disability — but the LG, VAX and VOLTA can be recommended with some reservations.

The VOLTA's lighter weight makes it easier to carry for those with back or strength issues, but the cleaner head on the LG and the VAX is easier to move over carpet than the VOLTA's.

None of these models has controls on the wand, so you'd have to bend down to turn them on and off — which may be difficult for wheelchair users and those with back trouble.

## HOW WE TESTED



It's best to try out a vacuum cleaner in the shop to see how easy it is to manoeuvre over carpet and hard surfaces.

- For the dirt removal tests, our tester embedded a set amount of sand evenly in a section of carpet, vacuumed it using a set pattern and speed, then weighed the sand collected and recorded it as a percentage of the amount applied.
- He carried out similar tests to determine the dirt removal score from hard floors, using the cleaners on their hard floor setting (or with a hard floor tool, if supplied).
- With the vacs again set to the hard floor setting, our tester ran them back and forth 50 times over a lacquered fibre board to see whether they left scratch marks.
- He spread sand into a 90° corner and vacuumed it to see how well the machines cope with corners and edges.
- For ease of use, he assessed the cleaners' general mobility and head movement, their controls, tools and versatility. He checked how easy they are to fit under low furniture and how easy the dust collectors are to empty and/or change.
- He also measured the cleaners' noise at the user's position. Some cleaners have a high-pitched whistle that can be irritating, even though they're no louder than others.

## Profiles



### VOLTA Pulsar Power Plus Parketto U4505

PRICE \$150

#### GOOD POINTS

- Has a dusting brush, crevice and upholstery tools with onboard storage.
- Telescopic wand.
- Easy to use controls.

#### BAD POINTS

- High-pitched sound can be irritating.



### LG V-CD504STU

PRICE \$199

#### GOOD POINTS

- Has a dusting brush, and crevice and upholstery tools.
- Its cleaner head is easy to move over carpet.
- Very good reach from a power point.
- Telescopic wand.
- Easy to use controls.

#### BAD POINTS

- No onboard storage for the upholstery tool.

The Volta removed the most dirt from carpets and is also excellent on hard floors.



### NILFISK Coupe Parquet

PRICE \$179

#### GOOD POINTS

- Has a dusting brush and upholstery tool with onboard storage.
- Comparatively quiet.
- Its cleaning head is easy to move over carpet.
- Very good reach from a power point.
- Telescopic wand.
- Easy to use controls.

#### BAD POINTS

- No crevice tool.

| PRODUCT                                    |         | PERFORMANCE       |                                      |                                          |                        |                                      |                       |            | FEATURES           |
|--------------------------------------------|---------|-------------------|--------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|------------------------|--------------------------------------|-----------------------|------------|--------------------|
| Brand / model (in rank order)              | Type    | Overall score (%) | Dirt removal score — from carpet (%) | Dirt removal score — from hard floor (%) | Scratch test score (%) | Cleaning corners and edges score (%) | Ease of use score (%) | Noise (dB) | Dust collector     |
| Volta Pulsar Power Plus Parketto U4505 (A) | Barrel  | 79                | 59                                   | 100                                      | 100                    | 75                                   | 82                    | 73         | Paper or cloth bag |
| LG V-CD504STU                              | Barrel  | 77                | 57 / 58 (D)                          | 94                                       | 100                    | 80 / 74 (D)                          | 83                    | 73         | Paper or cloth bag |
| Nilfisk Coupe Parquet                      | Barrel  | 75                | 54                                   | 100                                      | 100                    | 70                                   | 77                    | 68         | Paper bag          |
| Vax Vivality V-071 (B)                     | Barrel  | 75                | 56                                   | 100                                      | 100                    | 70                                   | 75                    | 68         | Cloth bag          |
| Genius 2400 Bagless MC-801E (C)            | Barrel  | 74                | 53                                   | 100                                      | 100                    | 75                                   | 75                    | 74         | Bin                |
| Kambrook Jaguar KVC30                      | Barrel  | 74                | 52                                   | 99                                       | 100                    | 73                                   | 77                    | 73         | Paper or cloth bag |
| Panasonic MC-CG463                         | Barrel  | 73                | 48                                   | 100                                      | 100                    | 70                                   | 77                    | 73         | Paper bag          |
| Sanyo SC-S700                              | Barrel  | 69                | 52                                   | 100                                      | 100                    | 55                                   | 63                    | 76         | Cloth bag          |
| Tiffany VC2200                             | Barrel  | 69                | 48                                   | 99                                       | 100                    | 76                                   | 65                    | 73         | Cloth bag          |
| Shop Vac Compact 462/2/3                   | Barrel  | 68                | 50                                   | 99                                       | 100                    | 65                                   | 60                    | 72         | Cloth bag          |
| Hitachi CV-T885                            | Barrel  | 65                | 56                                   | 99                                       | 30                     | 70                                   | 60                    | 69         | Cloth bag          |
| Hoover Breeze Bagless U5025-906 (C)        | Upright | 60                | 50                                   | 87                                       | 30                     | 40                                   | 63                    | 74         | Bin                |
| Piranha Magnum 1800W Bagless Vac 900016    | Barrel  | 58                | 22                                   | 100                                      | 100                    | 35                                   | 65                    | 71         | Bin                |



### VAX Vivality V-071

PRICE \$169

#### GOOD POINTS

- Has a dusting brush, crevice and upholstery tools, with onboard storage.
- Comparatively quiet
- Its cleaner head is very easy to move over carpet.
- Very good reach from a power point.
- Telescopic wand.
- Easy to use controls.

#### BAD POINTS

- High-pitched sound can be irritating.



### GENIUS 2400 Bagless MC-801E

PRICE \$149

#### GOOD POINTS

- Has a dusting brush, crevice and upholstery tools, with onboard storage.
- Its cleaner head is easy to move over carpet.
- Excellent reach from a power point.
- Telescopic wand.

#### BAD POINTS

- The bin is a tight fit and is difficult to remove and replace. It can also be incorrectly installed.

BEST  
BUY



### KAMBROOK Jaguar KVC30

PRICE \$100

#### GOOD POINTS

- Has a dusting brush, crevice and upholstery tools.
- Its cleaner head is very easy to move over carpet.
- Telescopic wand — but some may still find it too short.
- Easy to use controls.

#### BAD POINTS

- High-pitched sound can be irritating.
- Onboard storage for crevice tool only.

The Jaguar from Kambrook is a good cheap vacuum cleaner, but its high-pitched sound could be irritating.

PHOTOGRAPHY: GENE ROSS

|                 |                      |                      |                |             | SPECIFICATIONS                      |           |             |                            |  | Price (\$) |
|-----------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------|-------------|-------------------------------------|-----------|-------------|----------------------------|--|------------|
| Upholstery tool | Onboard tool storage | Wand suction control | Variable power | HEPA filter | Power measured at maximum speed (W) | Reach (m) | Weight (kg) | Contact                    |  |            |
| ✓               | ✓                    | ✓                    | ✓              | ✓           | 1640                                | 7.8       | 5.8         | www.thegoodguys.com.au     |  | 150        |
| ✓               | ✓ (E)                | ✓                    | ✓              | ✓           | 1740                                | 8.4       | 7.0         | www.lge.com.au             |  | 199        |
| ✓               | ✓                    | ✓                    | ✓              | ✓           | 1530                                | 8.5       | 6.6         | www.nilfisk-advance.com.au |  | 179        |
| ✓               | ✓                    | ✓                    | ✓              | ✓           | 1830                                | 8.8       | 8.1         | www.vax.com.au             |  | 169        |
| ✓               | ✓                    | ✓                    | ✓              | ✓           | 2050                                | 10.4      | 7.1         | www.godfreys.com.au        |  | 149        |
| ✓               | ✓ (F)                | ✓                    | ✓              | ✓           | 1590                                | 7.1       | 5.5         | www.breville.com.au        |  | 100        |
|                 | ✓                    | ✓                    | ✓              | ✓           | 1670                                | 7.8       | 6.2         | www.panasonic.com.au       |  | 169        |
|                 | ✓                    | ✓                    | ✓              | ✓           | 1830                                | 10.8      | 8.3         | www.sanyo.com.au           |  | 179        |
|                 | ✓                    | ✓                    | ✓              | ✓           | 2040                                | 7.6       | 8.0         | www.gafcontrol.com.au      |  | 120        |
|                 | ✓                    | ✓                    | ✓              | ✓           | 1250                                | 7.6       | 4.9         | www.shopvac.com.au         |  | 73         |
|                 | ✓                    | ✓                    | ✓              | ✓           | 1350                                | 7.8       | 5.4         | www.hitachi.com.au         |  | 109        |
| ✓               | ✓                    | ✓                    | ✓              | ✓           | 1120                                | 11.0      | 7.3         | www.godfreys.com.au        |  | 199        |
|                 | ✓                    | ✓                    | ✓              | ✓           | 1470                                | 7.8       | 6.5         | www.hegroup.com.au         |  | 159        |

#### USING THE TABLE

Our tester used the same 80/20 wool/nylon mix carpet used in the test of expensive vacuum cleaners (CHOICE, June 2007). All tests prior to this used a different kind of carpet, so no comparisons can be made with earlier models.

**Scores** The overall score is made up of:

- Dirt removal from carpet: 35%
- Dirt removal from hard floor: 21%
- Cleaning corners and edges: 7%
- Scratch test: 7%
- Ease of use: 30%

**Features** See *What to look for*, page 48, for more on the features in the table.

**Measured power** Higher power doesn't guarantee better cleaning performance, as the table shows.

**Price** Recommended retail, as of August 2007.

#### TABLE NOTES

(A) Discontinued, but the new model will only have colour and graphic changes. Exclusive to Good Guys Stores.

(B) Exclusive to Retravision.

(C) Exclusive to Godfreys.

(D) The second number shows the score when using the additional turbo brush; the overall score isn't affected.

(E) For crevice tool and dusting brush only.

(F) For crevice tool only.



# A run for your money

Like to exercise in private rather than in a gym? A treadmill could be for you, but how much do you need to pay?

## WESLO Cadence A45

Retailer Big W ([www.bigw.com.au](http://www.bigw.com.au))  
Warranty 1 year (in home).  
Frame Aluminium  
Weight 48 kg  
Dimensions (cm, L x W x H) 157 x 68 x 120

\$500



## AVANTI G-Fit 100

Retailer Workout World ([www.workoutworld.com.au](http://www.workoutworld.com.au))  
Warranty Frame – Lifetime, Motor – 3 years, Electronics and parts – 3 years, Labour – 1 year (in home).  
Frame Reinforced steel  
Weight 61 kg  
Dimensions (cm, L x W x H) 155 x 80 x 135

\$1200



## AVANTI G-Fit 300

Retailer Workout World ([www.workoutworld.com.au](http://www.workoutworld.com.au))  
Warranty Frame – Lifetime, Motor – 3 years, Electronics and parts – 3 years, Labour – 1 year (in home).  
Frame Reinforced steel  
Weight 98 kg  
Dimensions (cm, L x W x H) 174 x 90 x 140

\$2200



## AVANTI X-Fit 2

Retailer Workout World ([www.workoutworld.com.au](http://www.workoutworld.com.au))  
Warranty Frame – Lifetime, Motor – 3 years, Electronics and parts – 3 years, Labour – 1 year (in home).  
Frame Reinforced steel  
Weight 107 kg  
Dimensions (cm, L x W x H) 188 x 92 x 146

\$3000



**W**e all know we need to exercise, but few of us have the time — and perhaps fewer still the motivation. That's where the home treadmill comes in. The most popular form of home exercise equipment, a treadmill is a motorised moving belt on which you run or walk. On cheaper models, you push a button to increase speed and measure distance. More expensive treadmills have a computer with various workout programs.

They're not cheap and many, purchased with the best of intentions, end up in the garage, never to be used again. So if you want to get your money's worth and achieve your fitness aims, it's vital to buy one you're actually going to use. To increase the odds of this happening, ask yourself a few key questions before you buy.

### Stepping out

First and foremost, think about how you plan to use your treadmill. Will it be for the occasional walk, predominantly for jogging or for serious running training? Will you be the only one using it, or do you think the whole family will get involved? Try to anticipate how your needs may change as you get fitter, too. If you're over

60 and wanting to take some gentle regular exercise, your routine won't vary much. But an athletic young person in training for a half marathon, a family of five with a couple of overweight teenagers or a novice starting a fitness regime for the first time are likely to see changes in their fitness levels, so they'll need to be able to step it up.

Think about where you live — treadmills take up a lot more space than you might realise. Can it stay in one place? If you'll be storing it after use, what size and weight can you comfortably move?

What features are important to you? For instance, do you like to listen to music while you run? Will a TV and a cupholder be essential if you're planning to exercise in your lounge room?

We asked ergonomics expert Dr Aron Murphy and Olympic athlete Jane Flemming to put treadmills at four price points through their paces. There's a mind-boggling array available (see *Check lots of brands*, page 54) and they don't offer the same features at each price point.

In this decision guide, we illustrate the kind of package each price point will give you. We selected three treadmills from a well-known brand, AVANTI, and one budget model from WESLO. We then looked at each machine, feature by feature, to see what you get for your money.

**If you want to get your money's worth and achieve your fitness aims, it's vital to buy a machine you'll enjoy using.**

# What you get for your treadmill dollars

## Console and programs



**WESLO CADENCE A45**

- Simple LCD-lit display.
- Displays basic information only — time, speed, distance and calories.
- Priority display feature means you can view the information you're most interested in.
- No specific programs, although it has some basic workout guidelines and heartrate information in the manual.



**AVANTI G-FIT 100**

- LCD display with back lighting.
- Displays time, distance, speed, calories, pulse rate.
- Limited range of programs — would suit walkers or joggers rather than runners. Programs are just preset amounts of time (15, 30 or 45 minutes).



**AVANTI G-FIT 300**

- LED display window with back lighting. Good size and clarity.
- 27 preset programs including heartrate control, weight lost, intermittent incline (hills), cool down and recovery.
- Has bi-modal operation. For example, if you're interested in seeing how far you've run and how many calories you've burned, you can flick between the two.
- Users can create and save their own customised programs and can enter and save their own age, height and weight information, which can be used for heartrate and weight lost programs.



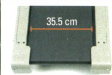
**AVANTI X-FIT 2**

- LED display window with back lighting. Good size and clarity.
- 27 preset programs including heartrate control, weight lost, intermittent incline (hills), cool down and recovery.
- Has bi-modal operation. For example, if you're interested in seeing how far you've run and how many calories you've burned, you can flick between the two.
- Users can create and save their own customised programs and can enter and save their own age, height and weight information, which can be used for heartrate and weight lost programs.

## Decision guide

- Display panels should have clear instructions and be easy to read and use, so the information you want isn't awkward to access while walking or running.
- Some models list factors like distance, speed and time as programs. Other listed programs are just time-based — so run through the programs to see what you think you'll need, and check there's enough variety to keep you motivated.
- Heartrate control programs automatically adjust the intensity of your workout to keep you in the recommended heartrate zone, so you can be sure you're getting a worthwhile cardio workout for your fitness level.
- Some treadmills have recovery programs, which test your physical condition by assessing how quickly your pulse returns to normal after you've been exercising.
- Our experts agreed that the wide range of programs and features offered by more expensive treadmills could be tricky to get your head around at first, but they'd be fairly easy to operate once you got used to them.
- Try the machine in the shop — walk and jog on it to get a feel of what the deck's like. "Ensure the machine feels stable, smooth and sturdy when you're walking and jogging. If it's wobbly, shaky or unstable, you'll feel uncomfortable and insecure on it," says Jane.
- The belt needs to be long enough and wide enough for the heaviest, tallest and fittest user. If that's not you, take them shopping with you and have them do a test run, too.
- A well-cushioned deck will absorb the force of your step, protecting your joints and ligaments from damage. According to Aron, this is most important for runners and people who use the treadmill a lot.
- The foot panels should be wide enough for you to stand on, so you can get your balance before stepping on the treadmill.
- The belt shouldn't slow down too much when your foot hits it.
- For fast jogging or running, you'll want a machine that reaches at least 16 km/h. If you'll only ever be walking or slow jogging, 10 km/h should be enough.
- A more powerful motor will generally take more punishment and last longer. Check the 'continuous-duty' rating, which is always less than the machine's 'peak duty' rating. Peak duty is the maximum power potential, which can't be sustained. A motor of at least 2.0 HP (horsepower) continuous (not peak) >

## Deck and motor



**WESLO CADENCE A45**

- Feels a little unstable when running, but OK for walking or light jogging.
- Belt: 35.5 cm x 116 cm.
- Speed: 0.8–13 km/h.
- Narrow belt isn't safe for tall users or runners. Would suit beginners, walkers, elderly and lightweight people.
- User weight limitation: 113 kg.
- 1.5 HP continuous-duty motor.
- Belt quality: comparatively poor.
- Cushioned deck.



**AVANTI G-FIT 100**

- Good stability.
- Belt: 40 cm x 120 cm.
- Speed: 0.8–12 km/h.
- Narrow belt.
- Would suit walkers or joggers — not serious runners.
- User weight limitation: 100 kg.
- 1.25 HP continuous-duty motor.
- Belt quality: OK.
- Cushioned deck with Swing Arm cushioning.



**AVANTI G-FIT 300**

- Good stability.
- Belt: 45 cm x 131 cm.
- Speed: 0.8–16 km/h.
- Good length and width for users of all fitness levels and heights.
- User weight limitation: 120 kg.
- 2.0 HP continuous-duty motor.
- Belt quality: comparatively good.
- Cushioned deck with Swing Arm cushioning.



**AVANTI X-FIT 2**

- Good stability.
- Belt: 44 cm x 131 cm.
- Speed: 0.8–16 km/h.
- Good length and width for users of all fitness levels and heights.
- User weight limitation: 120 kg.
- 3.0 HP continuous-duty motor.
- Belt quality: comparatively good.
- Wide foot rails.
- Cushioned deck with Swing Arm cushioning.

## Incline



### WESLO CADENCE A45

- 3 levels: 1.5%, 4.5% and 7%.
- Manual and fiddly. To change incline, you stop treadmill, then lift deck and remove incline pin and adjust incline leg to desired position, then repeat process on other side.



### AVANTI G-FIT 100

- 3 levels (incline levels not specified): to 5%
- Manual, but fairly easy. To change incline, you stop the treadmill, then lift the back end and rotate the incline knobs on each side to the desired level.



### AVANTI G-FIT 300

- 0 – 12%
- Smooth motorised incline. Change using the electronic display on the console. There's no need to stop the machine or interrupt your workout.



### AVANTI X-FIT 2

- 0 – 15%
- Smooth motorised incline. Change using the electronic display on the console. There's no need to stop the machine or interrupt your workout.

## Features



### WESLO CADENCE A45

- Cupholder.
- Safety key (see photo).
- Folds for storage.
- Wheels to help move it.



### AVANTI G-FIT 100

- Cup holder.
- Safety key.
- Folds for storage.
- Transport wheels.
- Hand pulse sensor grips to monitor heart rate on side handles (see photo).



### AVANTI G-FIT 300

- Cup holder.
- Safety key.
- Soft-drop and hydraulic assisted folding system.
- Transport wheels.
- Hand pulse sensor grips to monitor heart rate on the front handlebar (see photo).



### AVANTI X-FIT 2

- Cup holder.
- Safety key.
- Hydraulic assisted folding system.
- Transport wheels.
- Hand pulse grips to monitor heart rate.
- Motion control — allows you to change speed with a wave of the hand (see photo).
- Small magazine shelf.

## Decision guide

< duty is highly recommended for runners (as opposed to joggers), reasonably heavy users or more than one user.

- Jane advises taking into account the noise of the machine — have a good listen while it's running in the shop. You could try making a quick call on your mobile phone to gauge how noisy the treadmill is. Noise is one of the main reasons people stop using treadmills, especially if they'd planned to use it in front of the TV or while listening to music.
- The Swing Arm cushioning system (a feature unique to Avanti) uses a swing arm under the front of the treadmill, which disperses impact through itself, the deck and the frame, creating a smooth walk or run with reduced impact. Many other manufacturers have their own unique type of suspension system.
- Treadmill belts generally come prelubricated. Follow the manufacturer's instructions about when to apply more lubricant and what type of lubricant to buy.
- The incline function adds interest and intensity to your workout. Aron recommends a motorised or power incline (see the photos, above left), as this lets you vary the incline easily while exercising. With a manual incline (see the photos, above far left), you'll have to stop your workout and get off the treadmill to adjust it — but machines with manual incline are a lot cheaper.
- For challenging hill work, look for an incline level of at least 12%. Some machines have hill programs, which use incline levels to mimic a series of hills and valleys of varying lengths and gradients. These can be a great way to reach your peak performance level — and it's more fun than running at the same level all the time.
- Pulse sensors (see the photos, left) allow you to monitor your heart rate while exercising. Aron and Jane agree that pulse sensors in a position where you can reach them easily and they don't impede your movement while you're working out. Both our experts said it felt more natural having the sensors on a front handlebar.
- Jane liked the AVANTI X-FIT 2's motion control feature (see the photo, left), which lets you adjust the machine's speed without interrupting your rhythm or balance.
- Most treadmills have a safety key and we'd strongly recommend you buy a machine with this feature. Jane explains: "Always attach the safety key clip to your clothes. If you slip suddenly or need to stop in a hurry, pulling the key out stops the treadmill instantly. Taking the key away when you finish means that small children can't accidentally start the machine."



## TAKE A BIG STEP UP

Top-end treadmills retail for upwards of \$3,000. Generally speaking, compared with the models we looked at, the more expensive machines may have:

- A stronger, quieter, better-quality motor.
- A longer and wider belt.
- A higher maximum speed.
- A higher user-weight limitation.
- More programs.
- A longer warranty.
- Better-quality components throughout.

They may also feature:

- LCD TV (some with inputs for DVD/Foxtel).

- MP3 speaker dock.
- A wireless chest-strap heart rate monitor.
- A fan to keep you cool while you're working up a sweat — some even change airflow to match the speed of your exercise.
- A self-lubricating belt.

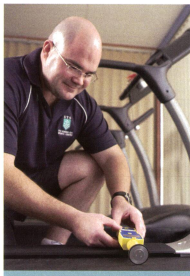
## CHECK LOTS OF BRANDS

Features vary across brands and treadmills are often on sale, so you might find these features at lower price points. We found around 40 brands for sale in Australia and only chose AVANTI and WESLO as examples. Some of the big players include INFINITI, REPCO SPORT, PRECOR and PROFORM.

## TREADMILL RECOMMENDATIONS

- Aron says, "The most important thing you need to consider is — will you actually use a treadmill if you buy one? And will you still be using it in six months?" If you're unsure, think about renting a treadmill. This will give you the opportunity to try it out before you shell out a large sum of money for something that may end up gathering dust in the corner. Many stores selling fitness equipment and some household appliance rental companies offer treadmills for hire.
- You may save money by buying online too, but before you buy, you'd be wise to do a test run of the model(s) you're considering in a shop. A treadmill is a very subjective purchase and it needs to feel right.
- Boredom is one of the main reasons people stop using treadmills. Make sure the speed, incline levels and programs combine to offer you enough variety to maintain your motivation and move with you as your fitness levels progress.
- Treadmills are designed to tolerate different loads. A machine with a higher maximum user weight will generally cost a bit more. Exceeding the maximum user weight could seriously damage the treadmill or cause injury to the user.
- Treadmills at lower price points usually have the advantage of being lighter, smaller and easier to fold away, so they're more suitable for small houses or flats and to people who are unable to shift heavy weights.
- The length of the warranty is the best indicator of quality and durability. Treadmills require regular maintenance and they do break down. Ensure you buy a treadmill with in-home warranty and service backup — you won't be able to fit a malfunctioning treadmill in the back of most cars without taking it apart completely, which isn't something most people want to do, even if they're capable.
- The price of some treadmills includes delivery and installation. Check if this is the case. Others are sold 'in the box' and require installation, which can cost up to \$200. Factor this into your budget if you're not mechanically minded or physically able to do it yourself.
- Our experts warned that some treadmills are quite a lot slower than their stated maximum speed. If you're a serious runner, try the machine's top speed before you buy to make sure it feels fast enough for you.
- "Start slowly with any new exercise program, particularly if you're not currently exercising regularly," advises Aron. "Increase your exercise intensity only when you feel comfortable doing so and your body is ready. See your doctor if you're unsure about an old injury or to get the go-ahead to exercise in terms of your general health. If you'd like professional help getting started with a program, look for a personal trainer with university qualifications and use them for a couple of weeks."

## Expert panel



Associate Professor Aron Murphy

Deputy Head, School of Leisure, Sport and Tourism, University of Technology, Sydney.



Jane Flemming

Olympic athlete and Commonwealth Games gold medalist.

## CHOICE verdict

At \$500 you'll get a basic machine with manual incline, suitable for walkers and light joggers of average height and weight. At \$1200 you can expect a machine with a better-quality deck, more durable motor and a heart rate monitor. Our \$2200 machine had more programs, a motorised and steeper incline capability, higher speed, wider belt, greater weight limit, more powerful motor, cool-down program and customisation of programs. Our highest-priced treadmill, at \$3000, offered more incline, a motion control feature and a stronger and more durable motor. Both our experts agreed, however, that the **\$2200 price point offered real value for money**. The AVANTI G-Fit 300 is well-built, has a good range of features and is suitable for all but elite runners, athletes or people over 120 kg. "At higher price points, you may be paying for features you won't ever use," says Aron. "Ask yourself if you need 12 computerised training programs instead of eight."

**N**owadays there are so many product recalls we may not be able to print all of them in CHOICE. For comprehensive recall information go to the Product Recalls Australia website: [www.recalls.gov.au](http://www.recalls.gov.au). If you don't have web access, call the Product Safety Policy section of the ACCC on 02 6243 1262.

Companies often rent 1800 numbers for a couple of months after a recall is announced. If the number given is no longer operating, phone the manufacturer or retailer direct.

**FOOD ■** Woolworths has recalled **Homebrand Milk Chocolate Scorched Almonds**, 300 g, best-before 18 Jun 08.

**The problem** Some packages contain milk chocolate peanuts instead of almonds.

**What to do** If you're allergic to peanuts, don't eat them. Return them to your nearest Woolworths, Safeway or Food for Less store for a refund, or for more information call 1800 638 434.

**FOOD ■** Windsor Farm Foods and Franklins have recalled **No Frills Canned Potato Salad in Mayonnaise**, batch code 070412.

**The problem** It contains milk products that aren't declared on the label.

**What to do** Don't eat it if you have a milk protein allergy or intolerance — otherwise it's fine to eat. Return it to your nearest Franklins store for a refund, or for more information call 1800 004 844.

**FOOD ■** Woolworths has recalled **Homebrand Oyster Sauce**, 500 mL glass bottle, all best-before dates.

**The problem** It contains wheat flour, a possible allergen, which isn't declared on the label.

**What to do** Return it to the place of purchase for a refund.

**TOY ■** Further to the recall CHOICE published last month on toys recalled due to lead contamination, Mattel has recalled another toy. The additional recalled toy is from the **Cars** die-cast vehicle assortment line, and is a green army vehicle, **'Sarge'**. It was manufactured between March 2007 and July 2007, has 7EA marked on the bottom and has the following model numbers on the package: H6414, M1253 or L6294. The affected toys are marked 'China'.

**The problem** It contains lead.

**What to do** Remove it from the reach of children. Call Mattel on 1800 674 753, or email [infoaust@matell.com](mailto:infoaust@matell.com), or go to [www.service.matell.com](http://www.service.matell.com). Don't return the toys to retail outlets — Mattel will advise you how to return the toys for a refund.

**TOY ■** Mattel has recalled numerous toys, sold between January 2002 and 31 January 2007. The toys, followed by their product number, are:

- Polly Pocket Happenin' Pet Pals Salon (55503)
- Polly Pocket Magnetic Additions Asst (B2631)
- Polly Pocket Hangin-Out House (B2632)
- Polly Pocket Treetop Clubhouse (B3158)
- Polly Pocket & Me Hair Caboodle (B3201)
- Polly Pocket & Me Activity Asst (B3202)
- Polly Pocket & Me Makeup Asst (B3206)
- Polly Pocket Divine Dogs with DVD (B7078)
- Polly Pocket Dazzlin' Pet Show Asst (B7080)
- Polly Pocket Polly Place Town Asst (B7123)
- Polly Pocket On-The-Go Asst (B7126)
- Polly Pocket Mermaid Stars Playset (G8602)
- Polly Pocket Quik Klik Boutique (G8605)

- Polly Pocket Quik Klik Shops Asst (G8606)
- Polly Pocket Snow Cool Hotel (G8612)
- Polly Pocket Quik Klik House of Style (G8614)
- Polly Pocket Totally Bead-iful (G8615)
- Polly Pocket Quik Klik House of Style (G8616)
- Pollyworld Limo (J1659)
- Pollyworld Dial a Style Asst (J1660)
- My Size Magnetic Polly (J1670)
- Pollyworld Place (J1681)
- Pollyworld Place Asst (J1682)
- Pollyworld Sky Lounge (J1687)
- Twirl N Swirl Beauty Case (J9648)
- Pollyworld Dial a Song (J9964)
- Pollyworld Theme Park Pals Asst (K0043)
- The Batman Magnet Lock Asst (J1943)
- One Piece Triple Slash Zolo (J4142)
- Barbie & Tanner — accessory item only (J9472).

**The problem** They contain small, powerful magnets that may be released.

**What to do** Remove them from the reach of children. Call Mattel on 1800 674 753, or email [infoaust@matell.com](mailto:infoaust@matell.com) or go to [www.service.matell.com](http://www.service.matell.com). Don't return the toys to retail outlets — Mattel will advise you how to return the toys for a refund.

**TOY ■** Early Learning Centre has recalled **ELC Wooden Rolling Drum**, product code 113412, for ages 12 months to 3 years, sold in Early Learning Centre and Kids Central stores between September 2006 and February 2007.

**The problem** The small beads inside the drum could become dislodged if the drum is dropped excessively.

**What to do** Remove from the reach of young children. Return it to any Early Learning Centre or Kids Central store for a refund or credit, or post it to ELC, Locked Bag 8000, Paddington 2021. For more information call 1300 850 123 or go to [www.earlylearningcentre.com.au](http://www.earlylearningcentre.com.au)

**TOY ■** Oriental Star has recalled various toys sold in Sydney since July 2005 at various retailers, bargain stores and toy stores. The toys affected are the **EG72186 Music Instrument**, item number 721864, **Baby Magic Shaker**, item number 166652, and **EG711734 Block Car**, item number 1717344, which was for sale from July 2006.

**The problem** They don't meet the mandatory requirements of the Aust/NZ toy standard.

**What to do** Remove them from the reach of children. To obtain a refund, return the toys to Oriental Star (Aust), Unit 2, 52 Alfred Road, Chipping Norton 2170.

**BICYCLE ■** Toys 'R Us has recalled **Dynacraft Rhye Screamer Boys Bike**, 45 cm, sold in Toys 'R Us stores between 28 July 2006 and 28 March 2007.

**The problem** The handbrake requires more force to be applied than is allowed by the Australian standard. The excess force required poses a safety hazard to children.

**What to do** Stop using the bike. Return it to your nearest Toys 'R Us store for a refund, or call 1800 241 390 for more information, or email [AUSOPS@Toysrus.com](mailto:AUSOPS@Toysrus.com).

**BICYCLE ■** WaiveStar Group has recalled **20 inch 6-speed Children's Mountain Bicycle**, model number JV13C10, distributed through Australia in December 2006 to new members of Medibank Private as part of a 'Get a bike for Christmas' offer.

**The problem** The pedal clearance height doesn't meet the Australian standard. The pedal may make contact with the ground when the bike is leaning. The quick release for the seat post also requires adjustment in excess of the manufacturer's specifications, a warning label on the frame is the incorrect size, and a safety warning about handle grips was omitted from the owner's handbook.

**What to do** Replacement pedals, a new warning label and an addendum to the owner's handbook will be delivered to owners. Don't use the bike until the new pedals have been fitted. For more information call 1300 885 904.

**BICYCLE ■** WaiveStar Group has recalled **26 inch, 18-speed Adult's Mountain Bicycle**, model number JV13C20, distributed through Australia in December 2006 to new members of Medibank Private as part of a 'Get a bike for Christmas' offer.

**The problem** A warning label on the frame is the incorrect size, and a safety warning about handle grips was omitted from the owner's handbook.

**What to do** A new warning label and an addendum to the owner's handbook will be delivered to owners. For more information call 1300 885 904.

**STROLLER ■** Exquira has recalled **Stokke Xplory Stroller**, serial numbers 1 to 27295, 27698 to 28097, barcode number 7040 3551 0001 0, country of origin Norway.

**The problem** The front wheels may detach from the chassis.

**What to do** Stop using it. Customers will be contacted directly, or for more information call 02 9417 3445, or email [info@exquira.com](mailto:info@exquira.com).

**BLANKET ■** Charles Parsons has recalled the **Superlux blanket**, a nylon/velour blanket sold to retailers for sale under the Gainsborough and Mercer + Reid brands since 2004. It was also sold to hotels and aged-care facilities under the Gainsborough brand.

**The problem** Independent testing has found it contains levels of formaldehyde that exceed the company's specifications.

**What to do** The level of formaldehyde may cause short-term skin or respiratory irritation, but washing the blanket will significantly reduce the levels of formaldehyde. Return it to the place of purchase for a refund, or for more information call 1800 678 251.



## + PRODUCT SAFETY

# Product safety is no accident

CHILDREN'S PRODUCT SAFETY TESTS PUBLISHED IN CHOICE 2001-2006

| Product         | Number tested | Failed Standard test | Passed           |
|-----------------|---------------|----------------------|------------------|
| Cots            | 29            | 11                   | 18               |
| Strollers       | 47            | 21                   | 26               |
| High chairs     | 32            | 13                   | 19               |
| Portable cots   | 10            | 0                    | 10               |
| Child gates     | 7             | 5                    | 2                |
| Baby monitors   | 9             | 0                    | 9                |
| Baby carriers   | 10            | 0                    | 10               |
| Bicycle helmets | 9             | 0                    | 9                |
| <b>TOTAL</b>    | <b>153</b>    | <b>50 (33%)</b>      | <b>103 (67%)</b> |

Consumers have the right to safe products. CHOICE supports a national approach to product safety.

**C**HOICE has been testing consumer products for nearly 50 years. Every year in Australia, around 750 people die and tens of thousands are injured because of poor product design, faults or misuse, or in other product safety-related accidents.

Consumers have the right to safe products — designed with safety in mind and adequately tested so they won't present unexpected hazards to consumers or their children. Of 153 children's products CHOICE has tested against the relevant Australian standard over the last six years, 33% failed (see the table, above).

In 2006, the Commonwealth Productivity Commission reported on its review of the Australian consumer product safety system, and CHOICE broadly welcomes most of its findings. We particularly support the strong emphasis on a national approach to product safety, with a single lead agency replacing the inconsistent mix of federal, state, territory and local regulations currently in place.

CHOICE also supports the Productivity Commission's call for further consideration to be given to the introduction of fines if a supplier breaches a product ban, and for adequate resources to be provided to ensure the product safety system is effective.

However, the review failed to support several major reforms needed to make products safe for consumers. In particular, CHOICE thinks there should be a national law imposing a General Safety Provision, which would place a clear obligation on manufacturers and distributors to ensure their products are safe before they reach consumers.

CHOICE is also disappointed that the commission failed to recommend mandatory recalls for unsafe goods. If a supplier knows a product is unsafe, they should be legally required to recall it.

CHOICE will continue to work for reform of Australia's product safety system so that all Australians have access to equal and effective protection from unsafe products. For more information, see [choice.com.au/productsafety](http://choice.com.au/productsafety) ■



## Bank penalty fees cut

CHOICE's Fair Fees campaign is gaining momentum. The National Australia Bank will cut its dishonour fees from \$50 to \$30 in 2008, and has launched a new transaction account with no penalty fees at all. ANZ changes include reduced fees on concession card holders' credit card accounts. For all the details, go to [fairfees.com.au](http://fairfees.com.au).

## + FINANCE

## Better protection for reverse mortgages

**A** CHOICE investigation into reverse mortgages earlier this year exposed serious flaws with these financial products. It's now prompted a positive response from lenders. In August, the industry association representing most reverse mortgage lenders announced three significant improvements to its voluntary industry code:

- A 'no negative equity' guarantee, which ensures that a borrower can never owe more than the value of their house, even if they're in default of any contract provision. (There are exemptions for fraud and wilful damage to the property.)
- A clear requirement that consumers must get independent legal advice before taking up a loan offer.
- Better guidance to estimate how the loan may grow over time.

CHOICE welcomes these improvements, but reverse mortgages remain a risky product — consumers can lose their home, and unknown variables such as interest rates and property values may influence the value of the loan. While this improved protection will benefit consumers, contracts still include other traps, such as wide-ranging default clauses that can put you in default of the contract for quite minor issues, such as not paying your rates on time. Consumers still need to take special care to make sure any financial product is right for them. ■

# Health information you can trust



Confused by the amount of health information available? Break through the clutter with **CHOICE Health Reader**.

**CHOICE Health Reader** looks at the latest health research, and comments on the most relevant advances and discoveries. You'll find information on nutrition, exercise, disease prevention, treatments, alternative medicines and much more.

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# How to use this index

**Bold type indicates a test, survey or trial report, normal type indicates other articles.**

\* indicates an update of a previous report, additions or corrections to reports, small follow-up items, letters or recalls.

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |                                                                             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |                                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |                                                                                                                                                                                                 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
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| Air conditioners<br>portable<br>small split-system<br>Airline satisfaction<br>Anti-aging cosmetics<br>Appliance reliability                                                                                                                                              | Oct<br>Jun<br>Jun<br>Jul<br>Sep                                             | Dishwasher detergents<br>Dishwashers<br>Dog leads, retractable<br>Drugs, prescription prices                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | Jan/Feb<br>Jan/Feb, Aug<br>Dec<br>Dec                                                                               | natural first-aid treatments<br>prescription prices<br>throat lozenges<br>Heaters<br>convection<br>gas, unflued<br>High chairs<br>Home and contents<br>insurance<br>Home theatre systems                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | Mar<br>Dec<br>Jun<br>Jun<br>May<br>May<br>Aug                                                                                                                                                   | Prescription prices<br>Price survey, supermarkets<br>Printers, inkjet                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | Dec<br>Jul<br>Nov                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| Baby food<br>Bank penalty fees<br>Barbecues, gas<br>Batteries, AA<br>Beer, premium<br>Blower vacs<br>Breadmakers<br>Breakfast cereals<br>Bulbs, compact fluorescent                                                                                                      | Jul<br>Jul, Sep*<br>Dec, Mar*<br>Jan/Feb<br>Aug<br>May<br>Sep<br>May<br>Oct | DVD/hard disc recorders<br>Bay, buying tickets on<br>Electricity, green<br>Espresso machines<br>Ethical investing<br>Exercise equipment<br>crosstrainers<br>treadmills                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | Nov<br>Aug<br>Jun<br>Mar, Jul*<br>Sep<br>Jan/Feb<br>Oct                                                             | Family tree software<br>Fans, ceiling<br>Fees, bank penalty<br>First aid, natural<br>Flights, carbon offsets for<br>Flu vaccinations<br>Fluoride in water<br>Food<br>10 fat foods<br>baby food<br>breakfast cereals<br>cheddar cheese<br>chocolates<br>cream and substitutes<br>diet cola<br>iced tea<br>meat, free-range<br>milk<br>olive oil<br>organic food<br>parmesan cheese<br>vegetables, fresh vs frozen<br>vs canned<br>vegetables, frozen mixed<br>yoghurt<br>Food processors<br>Fridges, mixed sizes                                                                                                                                                        | Jan/Feb<br>Jul<br>Jul<br>Oct<br>Dec<br>Sep<br>Apr<br>Nov<br>Mar<br>May<br>Jun<br>Aug<br>Jun<br>Nov, May<br>Nov, May                                                                             | Flanges, dual-fuel,<br>90 cm<br>Real estate, find an agent<br>Refrigerators — see Fridges<br>Reverse mortgages                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | Oct<br>Oct<br>Mar, Apr                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| Bulk-billing<br>Camcorders<br>Cameras, digital<br>Carbon-neutral flights<br>Carpet cleaning<br>Cars<br>ANCAP crash tests<br>child car restraints<br>GPS navigation systems<br>tyres<br>used car safety<br>Ceiling fans<br>Cereals, breakfast<br>Champagne/sparkling wine | Oct<br>Dec<br>Apr, Oct<br>Jun<br>Jun<br>Mar<br>Dec, Jan/Feb*                | Family tree software<br>Fans, ceiling<br>Fees, bank penalty<br>First aid, natural<br>Flights, carbon offsets for<br>Flu vaccinations<br>Fluoride in water<br>Food<br>10 fat foods<br>baby food<br>breakfast cereals<br>cheddar cheese<br>chocolates<br>cream and substitutes<br>diet cola<br>iced tea<br>meat, free-range<br>milk<br>olive oil<br>organic food<br>parmesan cheese<br>vegetables, fresh vs frozen<br>vs canned<br>vegetables, frozen mixed<br>yoghurt<br>Food processors<br>Fridges, mixed sizes | Jan/Feb<br>Jul<br>Jul<br>Oct<br>Dec<br>Sep<br>Apr<br>Nov<br>Mar<br>May<br>Jun<br>Aug<br>Jun<br>Nov, May<br>Nov, May | Insurance<br>home and contents<br>hospital<br>Internet/phone bundling<br>Investment, ethical<br>Juice, açai, goji, noni, etc<br>Landline, do you need one?<br>Laser eye surgery<br>Laundry detergent<br>Lawnmowers, petrol,<br>mulch/catch<br>LG steam washer/dryer<br>Light bulbs, compact<br>fluorescent<br>Mascara<br>Meat, free-range<br>Microwave ovens<br>Milk<br>Mobile phones<br>Mobile phone repairs<br>Moisturisers with sunscreen<br>MP3 players<br>Nanotechnology<br>Nappies<br>Natural first-aid treatments<br>Noise-cancelling<br>headphones<br>Olive oil<br>Organic food<br>Ovens<br>dual-fuel ranges, 90 cm<br>microwave<br>wall/under-bench, electric | May<br>May<br>May<br>Sep<br>Aug<br>Oct<br>Oct<br>Oct<br>Oct<br>Jan/Feb<br>Mar<br>Jun<br>May<br>May<br>Sep<br>Jan/Feb<br>Mar, Sep<br>Oct<br>Apr<br>Jul<br>Mar<br>Aug<br>Jun<br>Oct<br>Jun<br>Apr | Set-top boxes<br>with PVR<br>Shoes, cost comparison<br>Shonkys, The<br>Showerheads,<br>water-efficient<br>Shredders, paper<br>Sofa beds<br>Sparkling wine/champagne<br>Strollers<br>four-wheel<br>three-wheel<br>Supermarket price survey<br>Supermarket pricing<br>Tanning, DIY<br>Tea, iced<br>Telephones — see Phones<br>Television<br>66 cm<br>80 cm<br>101–107 cm<br>106 cm<br>digital TV explained<br>set-top boxes<br>with PVR<br>Throat lozenges<br>Tickets, buying on eBay<br>Travel money<br>Treadmills<br>Tyres<br>Unit pricing<br>Vacuum cleaners<br>Vegetables<br>fresh vs frozen vs canned<br>fresh mixed<br>Walking poles<br>Wall/under-bench ovens,<br>electric<br>Washer/dryer, steam<br>Washing machines<br>Water-efficient home<br>Water-efficient showerheads<br>Water safety products for<br>children<br>Wedding dress, buying<br>Wine, sparkling<br>Yoghurt | May<br>Apr<br>Mar<br>Nov<br>Nov<br>Oct<br>Apr<br>Jul<br>Dec, Jan/Feb*<br>Dec<br>May<br>Apr<br>Jun<br>Aug<br>Oct<br>Sep<br>Apr<br>Nov, Jun,<br>Jul*, Oct<br>Apr<br>Aug<br>Aug<br>Apr<br>Apr<br>Mar<br>Sep<br>Oct<br>Mar, Apr*<br>Dec<br>Jan/Feb*<br>Jun<br>Jun |

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The prize for best entry goes to W Gould for the disappointing holiday. Thanks also to P Jenkins, M Sharp, I Tuohy, P Truscott, K Paget, P Shute, P Frith, Helen, A Rush, C Ozga, J Jeal, J Booth, W Swift, B Retschlag, M van Luyn, T (and L) Housden, P Jessop and G Orton for their contributions to this month's Hard Word.

If you have any examples you think deserve to be on this page, send them to The Hard Word, CHOICE, 57 Carrington Road, Marrickville 2204. Please don't email us your entries — we need the originals.

**If you like disappointing holidays, try Tahiti.**

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Be Quick  
Takes the Green Challenge with forward solar systems



TAKES THE GREEN CHALLENGE WITH FORWARD SOLAR SYSTEMS

**"Be quick" — before they're banned**

A gas patio heater is an unusual choice of reward for buying a solar hot water system — and hardly likely to get the 'Green' vote. These notoriously inefficient greenhouse gas producers, which have been referred to as 'the new 4WDs', are accused of heating nothing but the outside air (OK, and the planet) and are considered the new bad guy by environmentalists.

The explosion in patio heater sales to British pubs, due to indoor smoking bans, has brought the issue to the fore. It's estimated they could produce as much as 160,000 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> per year, putting a serious dampener on Britain's attempts to meet its Kyoto protocol targets.

Granted, combined with your new solar hot water system you'll probably still be in carbon credit, but wouldn't a jumper and some nice cosy blankets be more suitable?



**Waiter! There's a fly...**

...on my cupcake?! This Coles catalogue must have been produced on the fly (sorry).

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**Flat as a very high stack of pancakes?**



**Folds Flat**

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**Who'd have thought hanging a picture hook could be so dangerous?**

